

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF CHINA

VOLUME 8
THE MING DYNASTY
1368–1644
PART 2



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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY
OF CHINA

General Editors

DENIS TWITCHETT AND JOHN K. FAIRBANK

Volume 8
The Ming Dynasty, 1368 – 1644, Part 2

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edited by

DENIS TWITCHETT and FREDERICK W. MOTE



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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

When *The Cambridge History of China* was first planned, more than two decades ago, it was naturally intended that it should begin with the very earliest periods of Chinese history. However, the production of the series has taken place over a period of years when our knowledge both of Chinese prehistory and of much of the first millennium BC has been transformed by the spate of archeological discoveries that began in the 1920s and has been gathering increasing momentum since the early 1970s. This flood of new information has changed our view of early history repeatedly, and there is not yet any generally accepted synthesis of this new evidence and the traditional written record. In spite of repeated efforts to plan and produce a volume or volumes that would summarize the present state of our knowledge of early China, it has so far proved impossible to do so. It may well be another decade before it will prove practical to undertake a synthesis of all these new discoveries that is likely to have some enduring value. Reluctantly, therefore, we begin the coverage of *The Cambridge History of China* with the establishment of the first imperial regimes, those of Ch'in and Han. We are conscious that this leaves a millennium or more of the recorded past to be dealt with elsewhere and at another time. We are equally conscious of the fact that the events and developments of the first millennium BC laid the foundations for the Chinese society and its ideas and institutions that we are about to describe. The institutions, the literary and artistic culture, the social forms, and the systems of ideas and beliefs of Ch'in and Han were firmly rooted in the past, and cannot be understood without some knowledge of this earlier history. As the modern world grows more interconnected, historical understanding of it becomes ever more necessary and the historian's task ever more complex. Fact and theory affect each other even as sources proliferate and knowledge increases. Merely to summarize what is known becomes an awesome task, yet a factual basis of knowledge is increasingly essential for historical thinking.

Since the beginning of the century, the Cambridge histories have set a pattern in the English-reading world for multivolume series containing chapters

written by specialists under the guidance of volume editors. *The Cambridge Modern History*, planned by Lord Acton, appeared in sixteen volumes between 1902 and 1912. It was followed by *The Cambridge Ancient History*, *The Cambridge Medieval History*, *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, and Cambridge histories of India, of Poland, and of the British Empire. The original *Modern History* has now been replaced by *The New Cambridge Modern History* in twelve volumes, and *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* is now being completed. Other Cambridge histories include histories of Islam, Arabic literature, Iran, Judaism, Africa, Japan, and Latin America.

In the case of China, Western historians face a special problem. The history of Chinese civilization is more extensive and complex than that of any single Western nation, and only slightly less ramified than the history of European civilization as a whole. The Chinese historical record is immensely detailed and extensive, and Chinese historical scholarship has been highly developed and sophisticated for many centuries. Yet until recent decades, the study of China in the West, despite the important pioneer work of European sinologists, had hardly progressed beyond the translation of some few classical historical texts, and the outline history of the major dynasties and their institutions.

Recently Western scholars have drawn more fully upon the rich traditions of historical scholarship in China and also in Japan, and greatly advanced both our detailed knowledge of past events and institutions, and also our critical understanding of traditional historiography. In addition, the present generation of Western historians of China can also draw upon the new outlooks and techniques of modern Western historical scholarship, and upon recent developments in the social sciences, while continuing to build upon the solid foundations of rapidly progressing European, Japanese, and Chinese studies. Recent historical events, too, have given prominence to new problems, while throwing into question many older conceptions. Under these multiple impacts the Western revolution in Chinese studies is steadily gathering momentum.

When *The Cambridge History of China* was first planned in 1966, the aim was to provide a substantial account of the history of China as a benchmark for the Western history-reading public: an account of the current state of knowledge in six volumes. Since then the outpouring of current research, the application of new methods, and the extension of scholarship into new fields have further stimulated Chinese historical studies. This growth is indicated by the fact that the history has now become a planned fifteen volumes, but will still leave out such topics as the history of art and of literature, many aspects of economics and technology, and all the riches of local history.

The striking advances in our knowledge of China's past over the last decade will continue and accelerate. Western historians of this great and complex subject are justified in their efforts by the needs of their own peoples for greater and deeper understanding of China. Chinese history belongs to the world not only as a right and necessity, but also as a subject of compelling interest.

JOHN K. FAIRBANK
DENIS TWITCHETT

1976

GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE TO VOLUME 8

Thirty years have elapsed since 1966, when the late John King Fairbank and myself laid the first plans for a Cambridge History of China. The above General Editors' Preface was written twenty years ago, in 1976, and the first volumes appeared shortly afterwards in 1978 and 1979. With the appearance of this volume, eleven volumes are now in print.

Much has changed in the intervening years. In 1966, China and China's academe were entering into one of their bleakest periods with the onset of Mao's Great Cultural revolution. The historical profession, in common with all branches of intellectual endeavor, was devastated. Those Chinese colleagues whose participation in this enterprise we would have sought in normal times were silenced and humiliated. It was impossible to communicate with them and would have endangered them had we done so.

When we wrote in 1976, the unbelievable scale of the human suffering and the appalling damage that had been wrought was clear to see. Some prominent historians were dead, some by their own hands. Very many others had spent a decade and more living in degrading conditions in enforced banishment, prevented from continuing their work. Great institutions had ceased to function. Such academic life as survived was entirely politicized. The publication of serious scholarly historical journals and monographs had ceased from 1967 until 1972. Such few historical works as appeared were banal political propaganda. Even in 1976, serious publication was still a mere trickle, much of it completed in happier circumstances before the Cultural Revolution. There was still no formal graduate-level teaching in Chinese universities to produce the urgently needed younger generation of scholars.

When the first volumes of the Cambridge History of China appeared in 1978–9, the situation had begun to change. A number of Chinese historians had been allowed to travel to the West, at first mostly senior scholars warily participating in meetings and conferences. The initial planning of the two volumes of *The Cambridge History of China* on the Ming, of which this is the second, took place at two international workshops held in Princeton in 1979

and 1980, among the first such international meetings in which scholars from the People's Republic of China took part. Shortly after, in the early 1980s, the first students from the People's Republic began to enroll to take higher degrees in Western universities.

Sixteen years later, this present volume has been completed in a transformed atmosphere. Large international conferences on various aspects of history take place many times each year. Chinese graduate students come to the West in great numbers, their standards of training ever improving. Western historians no longer have to deal with Chinese contemporaries who have been deliberately isolated from world scholarship for decades. Much of the writing of Western historians on China is translated into Chinese. The spectrum of historical scholarship in China may still be more restricted than that with which we are familiar in the West, but China's historians now enjoy relatively free access to the world of Western knowledge. Many have been trained partly in Europe or North America, have a network of friends living abroad, and have some sense of common purpose in trying to understand the past in all its variety.

Fortunately, the disasters that befell those Chinese historians working in the People's Republic did not affect all Chinese historians. There have always been comparatively small groups of scholars in universities in Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore who fruitfully combined Western and traditional Chinese historical approaches, and these have continued to thrive.

More important, however, has been the scholarly world of Taiwan, where many important Chinese scholars of the 1930s and 1940s resettled, and where they and their successors have systematically built up a scholarly community with great resources that has played a crucial international role in historical studies since the 1960s. In addition to the abundant research of its own scholars, who have preserved the best qualities of the historical scholarship of the Ch'ing and Republican periods, Taiwan has been an important training-ground for many Western historians. Its own historians have enjoyed longer and closer contacts with the Western scholarly community than their contemporaries working on the mainland. Many of them hold academic posts in North America. Their work is now available to and widely read by historians in the mainland and this helps greatly to give the historical profession a feeling of common purpose.

The last quarter century has seen other changes. Western scholarship on China has also been through a vast expansion in scale, in the diversity of subject matter that attracts serious academic interest, and has undergone a great improvement in the overall quality of scholarship. Western historians now freely use archival materials of all sorts both in the People's Republic and in Taiwan, access to which a quarter century ago would have been unthinkable.

Western and Chinese libraries collaborate in compiling global catalogs. Not only have a host of young Chinese scholars been able to travel abroad to pursue historical studies; many young Western graduate students and scholars have been able to study seriously in Chinese universities and institutes, and to travel freely in parts of China that were forbidden to foreigners until the early 1980s.

One striking result of this has been the emergence of a new generation of young Western scholars specializing in the early history of China, a field that had been seriously neglected in the west since the 1940s, but which had been transformed by the emergence of modern archaeology in the China of the late 1920s and 1930s, and particularly by new excavations after 1950. In the mid-1970s, when the flood of new archaeological discoveries were beginning to be published, we decided that the field of early Chinese history, although obviously of crucial importance, was still in such a state of flux that it would be premature to attempt an overview suitable for inclusion in *The Cambridge History of China*, and reluctantly we left it out of our coverage. Specialists in the period showed more courage, and eagerly exploited this new material; many young historians, archaeologists, social anthropologists, epigraphers, and linguists began to publish work of the highest standards and to form a highly professional specialist group. This new wave of scholarship on early China has recently enabled Cambridge University Press to commission a separate *Cambridge History of Ancient China* that will fill this very important gap.

Another striking change since this enterprise began has been the radical change in our potential Western readership. In 1966, China was still for ordinary Western readers, even for many professional historians, a country on the periphery of Western man's vision, arousing general interest for the most part because of its recent revolution and its role in world politics. Its history was still territory for specialists. The movement to broaden the educational horizons in Western countries to include some coverage of non-Western cultures was then just beginning. It gathered momentum in the 1970s and 1980s and we can now assume that most educated persons will have had some exposure to Chinese culture and history, at least on a superficial level. The myopic view of the world that prevailed forty years ago, and which was exaggerated by China's own deliberate exclusion of foreigners and hostility to all things Western, broke down in the late 1970s and early 1980s as Asia began to loom ever larger in our common economic future, and as more Westerners began to visit the country as tourists and businessmen. Television also had a large role in creating this new awareness. By the mid-1980s, every Western owner of a television had absorbed a wealth of vivid images of what China looked like, from picturesque landscapes and some of the monuments of the past to the belching pollution of the industrial cities. Television

coverage of the events in T'ien-an men square produced visual impressions of the political system with a worldwide impact far more memorable than the best of printed journalism.

The end of isolation not only increased the knowledge of and interest in China in the West. A new openness was also forced upon the rulers of China. It was no longer possible for them to keep their population in ignorance of events and conditions in the rest of the world. Through television, the Chinese first saw in vivid images what the rest of the world looked like; later, more and more of them travelled and saw the world outside, or were able to establish links with relatives, colleagues, and business associates living abroad. The coming of the computer and the fax machine established permanent two-way links with the world outside which can no longer be broken, however much the authorities deplore the flood of anti-social and decadent influences that have accompanied it.

The Chinese historian of the 1990s to whom we address this volume, whether he or she is Chinese or Western, whatever language he writes in, is part of this new internationalized system created by information technology, interlinkages, and interdependencies. We are still different in many ways, in the subjects we find of prime importance, in our overall conception of the social context of past events, in the lessons we seek from the past. But we all realize that the past is a permanent part of our identity, however rapidly our attitudes towards it and our interpretation of it may change. The disasters of China in the 1960s sprang from a misguided and futile belief that men can be made entirely anew and cut off from their past cultural experiences.

This past is not the monopoly of one country or of one culture. All our histories are part of the past experience of mankind. As we were saying twenty years ago, "Chinese history belongs to the world," and this becomes the more compelling as we live on into a future world in which China will undoubtedly regain its historical importance. We hope that this history, which is currently being translated into Chinese both in Beijing and Taipei, will contribute something to this mutual understanding.

DENIS TWITCHETT

1996

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The completion of this volume has been a collaborative effort extending over a period of fourteen years, and has involved in some way not only the contributors, but a large proportion of the community of Western Ming historians and many of our Chinese colleagues. They have generously given us help and detailed advice that has improved this volume in many ways. We cannot mention all by name, but we would like to record our special obligation to the late Professor Charles O. Hucker, who sadly did not live to see the volume's publication, but who not only played a large part in its planning and preparation, but more importantly was a major figure in the whole development of the field of Ming studies since the 1950s.

Assembling the chapters for a large multi-authored volume such as this is only one step in its production. Much intricate and laborious work is then required to make the volume as a whole consistent and uniform in style. The present volume has benefited greatly from the dedication and meticulous attention to detail of two managing editors, Dr James Geiss, himself a distinguished Ming historian, and since 1990 Ralph L. Meyer, whose computer skills and editorial ingenuity have transformed our work. We have also been fortunate in having the assistance of Dr Martin Heijdra of the Gest Library, Princeton University, and of his colleague, Mrs Soowin Kim, in solving bibliographical problems and acquiring materials for us.

The long years of preparation of this volume have been generously supported by successive grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by Princeton University, who have provided facilities and material support for our efforts.

CONVENTIONS

Chinese is transliterated according to the Wade-Giles system, which for all its imperfections is still employed almost universally in the serious literature on China written in English. There are a few exceptions which are noted below. For Japanese, the Hepburn system of romanization is followed. Mongolian is transliterated following A. Mostaert, *Dictionnaire Ordos* (Peking, Catholic University, 1941) as modified by Francis W. Cleaves, and used in Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among equals* (Berkeley, 1983), p. xi. These modifications are as follows:

č becomes ch
š becomes sh
γ becomes gh
q becomes kh
j becomes j

The transliteration of other foreign languages follows the usage in L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming biography* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1976).

Chinese personal names are given following their native form, that is with surname preceding the given name, transliterated in the Wade-Giles system. In the case of Chinese authors of Western-language works, the names are given in their published form in which the given name may sometimes precede the surname (for example, Chaoying Fang). In the case of some contemporary scholars from the People's Republic of China we employ their preferred romanization in the Pinyin system (for example, Wang Yuquan), and for some Hong Kong scholars we follow the Cantonese transcriptions of their names under which they publish in English (for example Hok-lam Chan, Chiu Ling-yeoung).

Chinese place names are transliterated according to the Wade-Giles system with the exception of those places familiar in the English-language literature

in non-standard Postal spellings. For a list of these see G. William Skinner, *Modern Chinese society: a critical bibliography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), Vol. I, Introduction, p. lix.

Ming official titles follow those given in Charles O. Hucker, *A dictionary of official titles in imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), with the following modifications regarding the terms “Secretariat” and “grand secretariat”. For the period until 1380 the term “Secretariat” is employed. After that date, we employ consistently the form “grand secretariat” to translate *nei-ko* to underline the unofficial character of that institution. Its members are referred to with the title “grand secretary.” The translation “county” is used for *hsien* rather than “district” to avoid ambiguities.

Emperors are referred to by their temple names or by their reign titles during their reign and by their personal names prior to their accession. The reign title of Ch’eng-tsu is transliterated in the form Yung-lo, which has become conventional in English-language literature, rather than in the more correct form Yung-le.

Dates have been converted to their Western equivalents in the Julian calendar until 1582 and the Gregorian calendar thereafter, following Keith Hazelton, *A synchronic Chinese-Western daily calendar 1341–1661 AD*, Ming Studies Research Series, No. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). The reader should remember that when Chinese sources refer to a year alone, this year does not correspond exactly with its Western equivalent.

The ages of individuals are sometimes cited in the Chinese form of *sui*. Conventionally, a person was one *sui* at birth and became two *sui* on the New Year following. Thus in Western terms a person was always at least one year younger than his Chinese age in *sui* and might be almost two years younger if he were born at the end of the Chinese year.

The maps are based upon the recent historical atlas of Yüan and Ming China, which appears as Vol. 7 of the series *Chung-kuo li-shih ti-t’u chi* (Shanghai: Chung-hua ti-t’u hsüeh-she, 1975).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIHP	<i>Chung yang yen chiu yüan li shih yü yen yen chiu so (Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica)</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CKL	<i>Cho keng lu</i>
CNW	<i>Chung-kuo nei luan wai huo li shih ts'ung shu (alternately Chung-kuo chin tai nei luan wai huo li shih ku shih ts'ung shu)</i>
CSL	<i>Ta Ch'ing li ch'ao shih lu</i>
DMB	<i>Dictionary of Ming Biography</i>
ECCP	<i>Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period</i>
HJAS	<i>Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
KC	<i>Kuo ch'üeh</i>
MC	<i>Ming chi</i>
MCSYC	<i>Ming ch'ing shih yen chiu ts'ung kao</i>
MHY	<i>Ta Ming hui yao</i>
MS	<i>Ming shih</i>
MSCSPM	<i>Ming shih chi shih pen mo</i>
MSL	<i>Ming shih lu</i>
MTC	<i>Ming t'ung chien</i>
MTCTS	<i>Ming tai chih tu shih lun t'ung</i>
MTSHCCS	<i>Ming tai she hui ching chi shih lun ts'ung</i>
TMHT	<i>Ta Ming hui tien</i>
TW	<i>T'ai-wan wen hsien ts'ung k'an</i>
YS	<i>Yüan shih</i>

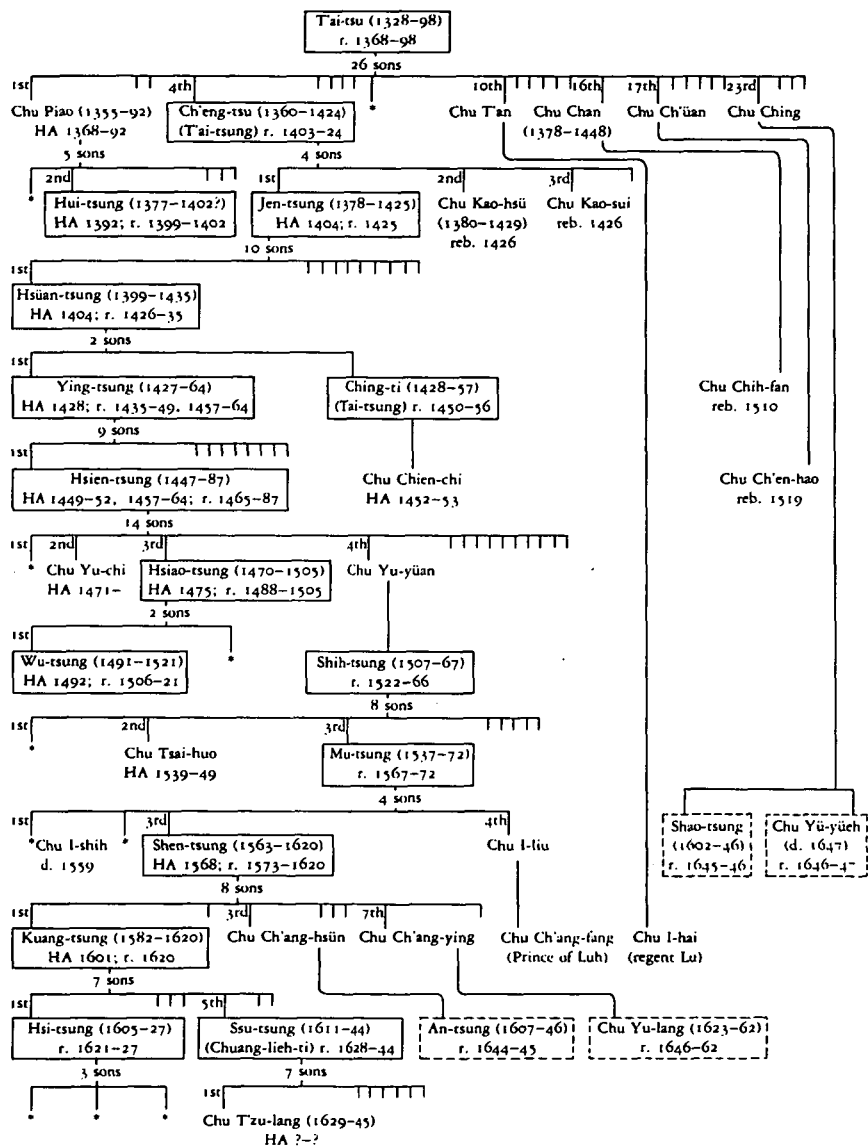
MING WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

I. Length	1 <i>ch'ih</i>	=	10 <i>ts'un</i>
		=	12.3 inches (approx.)
	1 <i>pu</i> (double pace)	=	5 <i>ch'ih</i>
	1 <i>chang</i>	=	10 <i>ch'ih</i>
II. Weight	1 <i>li</i>	=	1/3 mile
	1 <i>liang</i> (tael)	=	1.3 ounces
	1 <i>chin</i> (catty)	=	16 <i>liang</i>
		=	1.3 pounds (approx.)
III. Capacity	1 <i>sheng</i>	=	0.99 quart (approx.)
	1 <i>tou</i>	=	10 <i>sheng</i>
	1 <i>shih tan</i> (picul)*	=	10 <i>tou</i>
		=	99 quarts
IV.		=	3.1 bushels
	Area 1 <i>mou</i> (<i>mu</i>)	=	0.14 acre
	1 <i>ch'ing</i>	=	100 <i>mou</i>
		=	

Note: The Chinese measurements sometimes mentioned in these chapters derive from a bewildering variety of sources and from regions where standard units varied. They do not imply a dynasty-long or empirewide standard and are to be treated only as approximations.

*The *shih|tan* was properly a measure of capacity. It is, however, frequently used also as a measure of weight equivalent to 100 *chin*.

GENEALOGY OF THE MING IMPERIAL FAMILY



* = Sons who died before maturity (selected). r. = Reign period as emperor.
HA = Male heir apparent. reb. = Rebelled. Dashed box = Southern Ming emperors

Note: Table shows only male members of the Chu imperial family who were significant in the line of imperial succession, who were important rebels, or who were forebears of such men. The numbers of sons and generational placement of certain individuals follow data in the "Pen chi" and "Chu wang hsi piao" sections of the *Ming shih*, corroborated closely in *DMB* and *ECCP*. Other sources may vary on account of criteria for establishing "legitimate" sons, etc.

Key to numbered prefectures

NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

1 Yen-ch'ing chou

SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

1 Ch'ang-chou fu

2 Chen-chiang fu

3 Kuang-te fu

CHEKIANG

1 Chia-hsing fu

2 Ning-po fu

KWANGTUNG

1 Nan-hsiung fu

KIANGSI

1 Chiu-chiang fu

HUKWANG

1 Han-yang fu

2 Pao-ching-chou Hsuan-wei ssu

3 Yung-shun Hsuan-wei ssu

KWANGSI

1 Chiang-chou

2 Hsiang-wu chou

3 Lung-chou

4 P'ing-hsiang chou

5 Ssu-ling chou

6 Ssu-ming fu

7 Tu-k'ang chou

KWEICHOW

1 An-nan wei

2 An-shun chou

3 Chen-ning chou

4 Chen-yuan fu

5 Ch'ih-shui wei

6 Hsin-tien wei

7 Hsing-lung wei

8 Li-ku chou

9 Li-ping fu

10 Lung-li wei

11 Pi-chieh wei

12 P'ing-pa wei

13 P'ing-yueh wei

14 P'u-an chou

15 P'u-shih suo

16 Shih-ch'ien fu

17 Ssu-chou fu

18 Ssu-nan fu

19 Tu-yun fu

20 Tung-jen fu

21 Wei-ch'ing wei

YUNNAN

1 Che-le-tien ssu

2 Chen-yuan fu

3 Ch'ang-chiang fu

4 Ho-ch'ing fu

5 Hsin-hua chou

6 Hsin-tien fu

7 Kan-yai Hsuan-fu ssu

8 Lung-chuan Hsuan-fu ssu

9 Mang-shih ssu

10 Meng-hua fu

11 Nan-tien Hsuan-fu ssu

12 Tai-hou chou

13 Wan-ben chou

SZECHWAN

1 Ch'ung-chou

2 Li-chou An-fu ssu

3 Mei-chou

4 T'ieh-ch'iao suo

5 Yung-ning Hsuan-fu ssu

THE MING EMPIRE

■ The capital cities

⊙ Provincial capitals

• Prefectural seats

— Provincial boundaries

--- Prefectural boundaries

Exterior boundaries shown were undemarcated and especially in the south-west are only approximate



INTRODUCTION

Volumes 7 and 8 of *The Cambridge History of China* are devoted to the Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644. Volume 7 provides a narrative account of Ming political history, and Volume 8 collects together various topical studies of that period. Both volumes were planned more than fifteen years ago at two successive summer conferences, generously funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and held in the summers of 1979 and 1980 at Princeton University. These meetings were attended by more than twenty potential authors and senior graduate students. They and the volume editors discussed the field of Ming studies for several weeks in each of those successive summers. A plan for the volumes was drawn up and chapters allocated to authors. It was decided to follow the model of the volumes on Sui and T'ang, the first of which was the only volume on the pre-modern period then published, and to produce a narrative volume followed by a second volume containing a collection of topical studies.

These meetings not only began the process of writing the Cambridge History volumes; they also stimulated a new level of interest in Ming studies among western scholars. And, coming as they did just as Chinese academe was emerging from the dark shadows of the 1960s and 1970s, they also helped lay the foundation for the fruitful collaboration between Chinese, Japanese, and western historians engaged in a common historical enterprise which we now take for granted.

A number of unforeseen circumstances delayed the schedule originally adopted for completing the two Ming volumes. Volume 7 appeared in 1988; an unauthorized Chinese translation appeared from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, in 1992. Now at last Volume 8 has finally made its way through the protracted process of writing, replanning, and editing. The field of Ming studies has developed rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, and some attempt has been made to incorporate the results of this new scholarship. Several essential chapters were assigned to authors only within the past three or four years, to respond to these broad developments and this has necessitated further changes in the editors' and individual authors' plans.

Assembling the chapters for a large multi-authored volume such as this is only one step in its production. Much intricate and laborious work is then required to make the volume as a whole consistent and uniform in style. The present volume has benefited greatly from the meticulous editorial skills of Dr James Geiss at an earlier stage, and of his successor, Ralph Meyer, who has prepared the computerized manuscript for publication. We have also been fortunate to have had the assistance of Dr Martin Heijdra of the Gest Library at Princeton University, who has helped solve many bibliographical problems and who has, as well, contributed a very substantial and original chapter of his own. We are also grateful to the authors included in this volume, and to many other colleagues in the field of Chinese historical studies, not only for their patience during these years, but also for their generous help and advice at innumerable points throughout the course of the volume's completion.

Volume 8 includes a number of topical studies on the Ming period, covering in one way or another the structure of government, the fiscal and legal systems, foreign relations, the working of local society, agriculture, money and the economy, transportation and communications, Buddhism and Taoism, and the history of Confucian thought. Most of those large topics cut across more than one of the essays here. Different views of some problems appear in two or more chapters, reflecting the different authors' own research findings. No overall interpretation of the period was imposed upon the authors; it was agreed that each author should write what he or she felt to be of interest and importance, and to disagree with other authors when they felt it necessary, but that they would be cognizant of each other's varying views and would address those differences in the text where appropriate.

Some large and important topics are not the subject of separate chapters, and some are not fully covered even where they have been brought into the discussion of other subjects. By plan, we reluctantly excluded (as in other volumes of *The Cambridge History of China*), chapters on Ming art and literature. Both are large and very active fields of scholarship. However, in the case of art, many high quality illustrations would have been an absolute necessity, and Ming literature is now so broadly studied as to merit its own volume. The absence of coverage of these topics, however, leaves the reader uninformed about matters of great significance to the educated elite that deeply influenced their ideas and lifestyles, and helped give them common concerns and a sense of identity.

We had originally planned to include specialists' chapters on the agrarian economy and agricultural technology, on crafts and various aspects of production technology, on science and its applications, on urban growth and the functions of cities, and on the social history of books and printing,

among other pertinent topics. At some stages in our planning, chapters on those subjects were undertaken, but later had to be abandoned. As the volume stands, significant aspects of all are touched upon in various chapters, as will become apparent to the reader. Nonetheless, we regret that this very large volume could not be that much larger, so as to accommodate those topics too, examined in greater depth.

Regional variety

Perhaps the most important change in our perception of Chinese history over the last quarter century has been the realization that while it remains important to attempt grand generalizations about developments in China as a whole, it is equally if not more important to describe specific phenomena in their regional setting. For earlier periods, the sparsity of information limits what can be done to localize Chinese history, except for a few areas about which we are abnormally well informed. With the Sung and Yüan it begins to become feasible for more and more localities. By the late fifteenth century, the historian is overwhelmed by the sheer volume of regional information, and it becomes essential that the regional factor be brought into the discussion of almost any subject. This applies not only to studies of rural society and of the relations between local officials and their government apparatus, of the local educated gentry who contributed so much to informal local governance, and of the rural population, all of which are dealt with at some length in this volume, but also to research into regional variations in the level of lawlessness and the preservation of public order, into studies of commercial, economic, and social networks, into differing regional and local levels of technological development and skills, and into discussions of local forms of religion, and regional schools of learning, thought, literature, and the arts.

Scientific thought

One still commonly encounters the somewhat formulaic view that Chinese science and scientific thought were components of high civilization that in China developed well ahead of its counterpart in the West until perhaps the twelfth century, but then became stultified and moribund through Ming and Ch'ing times. We believe that view has been greatly overstated. Ming government was at times oppressive, and the attempts to uphold an ever-narrowing Confucian orthodoxy were in some circumstances too successful, especially in relation to the civil service examination system and the official credo (if not the private thought) of the scholar-elite. But in fact the last century or more of the Ming period witnessed a remarkable flowering of

unorthodoxy, protest, uninhibited lifestyles, deep examination in literature and in thought of the relations between men and women, and of eccentric and creative expression in all the arts. And with the flowering of that *zeitgeist* there also appeared freedom from restrictive pressures on intellectual endeavor quite adequate to allow scientific thought to be productive.

The late Joseph Needham, although typifying the trend to see a general decline of science during the Ming, has noted a considerable revival of activity in mathematics after 1500. Important advances continued to be made in astronomy, notably in the practical application of astronomic observation to maritime navigation. There were notable advances in cartography and in devising maritime navigation charts and tables for widespread use of seamen. Medicine and pharmacology were particularly rich fields of Ming applied science. The age also produced some of the most important botanical writings in all of Chinese history, mostly practical in their focus, and written as adjuncts to agronomy, to pharmacology, or to prevention of famine in times of natural disasters. Sung Ying-hsing's *T'ien-kung k'ai-wu*, dated 1637, is an extensive and very valuable work on industrial technology, if altogether practical in its focus. We also see quite impressive examples in Ming times of architectural engineering, bridge building, and military technology. It may be true that scientific thought was not as creative in Ming times as it had been during the Sung (960–1279), but in the practical applications of science to daily life, the Ming was an important age. We believe that an essay endeavoring to collect and evaluate all the relevant information would have helped to finally render obsolete the misleading generalizations about a decline of mind and spirit in Ming times.

Agrarian technology

Technology as applied to agriculture is a field of study that clearly requires new research efforts. To our regret, the great twentieth-century figure in this field, the late Amano Motonosuke, was unable to complete for this volume a chapter initially planned for inclusion. That might have formed an essential component of an assessment of Ming China's agrarian economy. The subject is of greatest importance and interest. The Ming witnessed the initial phases of the adaptation of the New World crops, whose complex impact on Chinese society is still not adequately explored. But in addition, there is good evidence that Ming agriculture was already in a mode of rapid change and adaptivity even before the New World crops began to reach the Chinese farmer in the middle of the sixteenth century. It is clear that "unchanging China" was in fact much better able to make rapid and widespread adoption of those crops, to accept them into the diet, and to make use of them in new kinds of

economic planning than was European agriculture during those same centuries. Although Francesca Bray's recent volume on Chinese agriculture has made an impressive contribution to our general knowledge,¹ it still would be of greatest interest to see the information on the Ming period drawn together and systematically analyzed.

Handicraft production

It also would be possible, although not easy, to produce an overview of crafts, craft production, and the artisanate, from technological, artistic, social and economic points of view. Much information that would fall under this heading in fact appears scattered throughout this volume, but the subject still urgently needs an overview drawing out the social and economic ramifications of the huge skilled artisanate presented with a clear focus and going into greater specific detail. These aspects of Chinese civilization became the wonder of the world in later Ming times, when the western merchants first came to China largely in pursuit of its skilled craft products, the porcelains, the silks and brocades, the carvings in jade, ivory, and precious woods, lacquer wares and finely worked metals, and an unparalleled profusion of other luxury products.

But in addition to these superlative products for the luxury trade the Chinese craftsmen also produced with great ingenuity the innumerable commodities and artifacts essential to daily life, from shoes and hats and carts and plows, to knives and combs and scissors and iron pots, many kinds of paper and leather, basketry and pottery, and the world's most elegant furniture – an endless list of such items. We feel that the levels of design and utility in the making of these sorts of things reached new heights during Ming times, and Ming commerce distributed them to ever larger sectors of the population. To neglect this field is to by-pass much that gave Ming life its distinctive character, but there has been no attainable way to do otherwise in the present volume.

Cities and urbanization

Finally, urbanism and urbanization in Ming times are subjects now ripe for definitive treatment. Earlier studies have built strong conceptual and analytical frameworks for approaching the field.² Studies of marketing and trade

1 Francesca Bray, "Agriculture." In *Science and civilization in China*, Vol. VI, Part Two, ed. Joseph Needham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

2 E.g. Gilbert Rozman, *Urban Networks in Ch'ing China and Tokugawa Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, places Ming urban development in a schematic framework and introduces useful conceptual instruments.

from T'ang and Sung times onward by Denis Twitchett, Robert Hartwell, Shiba Yoshinobu, G. William Skinner, and others have built a picture among other things of the commercial revolution, the interdependence of urban and rural sectors, and the growth of national markets: in short, the economic functions that made a growing pattern of urbanization central to Chinese social history. And, the changing character of urban labor, noted by late Ming writers, also should form an important aspect of any study of urbanism.

To turn to the physical aspects of Ming cities, those aspects of architectural tradition and urban planning concepts that gave the great Ming capitals and hundreds of other larger and smaller cities their distinctive pattern and appearance, have been studied in some depth. A recent study of the third Ming capital, Chung-tu in Anhwei, built in the 1360s and 1370s, now shows us that Chung-tu was the essential effort from which stemmed the planning and design of both Nanking and Peking.³ This forces us to reassess the histories of the Ming capitals.

A large book recently appeared in China devoted entirely to various social and economic aspects of Ming cities⁴ that signals a growing interest among Chinese scholars in Chinese urbanism as a field of study in its own right. This places urbanism in the broadest social framework and systematically assembles a great quantity of information from traditional sources. Our sense of Ming cities and large towns, which existed in impressive number and were of surprising size and prosperity is greatly advanced by such recent studies.⁵ A focused analysis of the many aspects of Ming urbanism would have been a valuable addition to this volume; but it must await a new edition of *The Cambridge History of China* that the next generation of scholars surely will soon produce.

Other readers undoubtedly will find further lacunae in the present volume. China's ethnic minorities, for one example, from the Mongols settled in North China in military communities to the many ethnic groups governed by Ming-appointed chieftainships (*i'u-ssu*) should be explored as more than a problem in local administration. The place of women in Ming society appears to be coming into clearer focus, particularly as popular and entertainment literature becomes more fully studied. Many related issues, including child-rearing, adoption, marriage, concubinage, women's property, suicide, the new flourishing of eroticism, the history of medicine as it relates to women and children, are all among the set of historical issues awaiting mature

3 Wang Chien-ying, *Ming Chung-tu*, Peking, 1992.

4 Han Ta-ch'eng, *Ming tai ch'eng-shih yen-chiu*, Peking, 1991.

5 For an overview of recent secondary studies, see F. W. Mote, "Urban History in Later Imperial China," *Ming Studies*, 34 (1995), pp. 61-76.

investigation. The Ming military still needs a broad study touching on its management, its social composition, its training and specialized skills, its employment on the battlefield, and its role in preserving civil order.

While the present volume includes a masterly treatment of Ming Confucian thought, other aspects of the mentality of the elite and the literate sub-elite could round out our sense of the texture of Ming life, in which a rapidly changing merchant community also was becoming an ever more significant component.

All these and, no doubt, other special aspects of Ming China that are either wholly overlooked or not specifically treated in depth in this volume will occur to the reader, and as the period attracts an ever-growing group of specialists these gaps will become more and more apparent. We hope that the awareness of this volume's lacunae will stimulate others to undertake new research, and will lead to further publications.

It is inevitable in the production of a general work on this scale that limits must be imposed both on what it covers and also on how up-to-the-minute its coverage can be. Moreover, its editors must accept that, in a rapidly growing field of history such as this, where we are still scratching at the surface of vast riches in source material and beginning to put the data from many detailed investigations into a broader context and to apply new methodologies to our materials, it is inevitable that within a few years it will be overtaken by ongoing scholarship in some specific areas. Nevertheless, we believe that Volume 8 fills a present need, presents a good picture of current knowledge, has achieved a new level of synthesis in the fields it covers, and can now properly take its place in *The Cambridge History of China*.

F. W. Mote
D. C. Twitchett

CHAPTER 1

MING GOVERNMENT

The Ming dynasty is generally known as a period of stable, effective government during which some important new institutions developed. Although in the end the dynasty collapsed under the pressures of domestic rebellions and foreign invasions, it had long seemed the most secure and unchallengeable ruling house the Chinese had known, and its institutions were largely perpetuated with admiration by the succeeding Ch'ing dynasty.

The system of governance that matured in Ming times was the culmination of trends that became evident after the mid-T'ang period, developed markedly in Sung times, and were further stimulated by the Mongol occupation of China during the Yüan dynasty. The emperor was a supreme autocrat. Administration of the empire on his behalf was entrusted to Confucian-indoctrinated scholars who were selected for service on the basis of their scholastic merit as demonstrated in competitive recruitment examinations, who made career progress very largely on the basis of service judged by their peers to be meritorious, and who constituted a civil service that was significantly self-regulating.

The civil service dominated government to an unprecedented degree. It was not seriously challenged by hereditary nobles or military officers, although eunuch agents or manipulators of emperors often disrupted civil service dominance. Society at large was thoroughly integrated into the state to such an extent that, during the final decades of the Ming dynasty, rulers were securely in control of everything they wished to control, and no other group in society rivaled the status of the civil officialdom as the natural leaders of society.

This chapter describes the major characteristics of the Ming governmental system as it changed through decades of development and decline, considering in sequence the territorial organization of the Ming empire, the diverse groups that constituted the government, and the structure of the governmental establishment.¹

¹ The historical source materials on Ming government are extraordinarily abundant, as are modern studies in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages. The principal sources include the official dynastic

Footnote continued on next page

ADMINISTRATIVE GEOGRAPHY

The territory governed by the Ming emperors and their officialdom, vaster than a native dynasty had controlled since the High T'ang in the eighth century, incorporated most of what westerners have traditionally known as China proper. Sprawling roughly from the 40th to the 20th degrees of latitude and from the 100th to the 120th degrees of longitude, it was a squarish area of some 1,500,000 square miles, stretching from the Great Wall southward some 1,200 miles to the South China Sea, and from the Pacific Ocean westward some 1,200 miles to the Tibetan foothills. For a generation early in the dynasty, the territory of modern North Vietnam to the southwest was also incorporated into the Ming empire, and throughout the dynasty Ming armies garrisoned and dominated frontier marches to the northeast, north, and northwest of China proper, so that Ming governmental power was felt from Hami in Inner Asia, to the Amur River and the Korean frontier in the far northeast. In more remote regions, kings and chieftains from Southeast Asia, farther Inner Asia, Mongolia, Korea, and at times, even Japan, paid homage, regularly or irregularly, to the emperor of Ming China as their overlord.

From 1421 on, the Ming emperors presided over their empire from a dynastic capital at modern Peking. Earlier, from 1368 to 1420, the capital was in the southern heartland of the founding emperor's power, at modern Nanking. The capital cities were surrounded by province-size territories of "directly attached" (*chih-li*) regional and local administrations, called Metropolitan Areas (*ching* or *ching-shih*). In 1403, when transfer of the capital was first anticipated, what, until then, had been the province of Pei-p'ing (The North is Pacified) was reorganized as the Northern Metropolitan Area (Pei-ching [Northern Capital], whence comes the modern name Peking); and in 1421, when the transfer was formally accomplished, this Northern Metropolitan Area was redesignated the Metropolitan Area (*ching-shih*, often called

continued from previous page

history completed in 1736, the *Ming shih*, and the successive official compilations of administrative regulations called *Ta Ming hui tien* (the 1587 ed. as reprinted in the *Wan yu wen k'u* series in 1936 is cited here). Among the more useful modern Chinese references is T'ao Hsi-sheng and Shen Jen-yüan, *Ming Ch'ing cheng chih chih tu* (Taipei, 1967). English-language publications that are broadly descriptive include Charles O. Hucker, *The Traditional Chinese State in Ming Times (1368-1644)* (Tucson Arizona, 1961); his article entitled "Governmental organization of the Ming dynasty," *HJAS*, 21 (December, 1958), pp. 1-66, and 23 (1960-61), pp. 127-51, rpt. in John L. Bishop, ed., *Studies of governmental institutions in Chinese history* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 57-151; and pp. 70-82 of Hucker's *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, 1985). These are drawn from extensively in this presentation, and titles are rendered in English here in accordance with those found in *A dictionary of official titles in Imperial China*. A few other traditional and modern works are cited in the following notes, but no effort has been made to provide exhaustive bibliographic references.

Chih-li or *Pei Chih-li*). The original Metropolitan Area around Nanking, which was divided into the provinces of Kiangsu and Anhwei after Ming times, was redesignated the Southern Metropolitan Area (Nan-ching, whence comes the name Nanking; often called *Nan Chih-li*), and the original capital city now became an auxiliary capital with a skeletal central government. Retention of these special statuses for the Southern Metropolitan Area and the city of Nanking was an act of deference to the memory of the founding emperor.

Transfer of the capital from Nanking to Peking created some terminological confusion that students of fourteenth-century documents ignore at their peril. Until 1421, advance echelon agencies of the central government established at Peking, and the titles of appointees there, were prefixed with the designation auxiliary (*hsing-tsai*). In 1421 such usage was terminated, and the distinguishing prefix Nanking was applied to the shrunken central government agencies left at the original capital with skeletal staffs and largely ceremonial functions, so that the Ministry of Revenue at Peking, for example, had a shadowy counterpart in the south called the Nanking Ministry of Revenue. This reasonable pattern of nomenclature was reversed, however, from 1425 to 1441. During that period there was a never-realized plan to move the functioning central government back to Nanking. Accordingly, the prefix Nanking was dropped in reference to the still skeletal southern agencies and the prefix auxiliary was restored to the northern agencies, so that the functioning Ministry of Revenue in the real central government at Peking, for example, was unrealistically designated as the Auxiliary Ministry of Revenue. Its counterpart in the largely symbolic establishment at Nanking was unrealistically designated the Ministry of Revenue. For the convenience of readers, Western writers normally avoid this tangled pattern of nomenclature by consistently using the term Ministry of Revenue, for example, to mean the agency at Nanking through 1420 and the agency at Peking from 1421 on; by consistently using the prefix Nanking for all agencies and offices of the auxiliary central government at Nanking from 1421 on; and by applying the prefix auxiliary only to appropriate agencies and offices at Peking during the pre-1421 era of transition.

The founding emperor was himself not certain that Nanking was the most appropriate site for his dynastic capital and investigated alternative permanent locations in the north. Late in 1368, he designated the old Sung capital city, K'ai-feng in Honan province, as his Northern Capital (*Pei-ching*), but Honan did not become a metropolitan area. Within a year the prospect of establishing a central government there was abandoned, and in 1378 the designation was revoked. In 1391, the founding emperor gave consideration to

a recommendation that his capital be moved to the old T'ang capital Ch'ang-an in Shensi province, but nothing came of that. More enduring was the Hung-wu emperor's honorific designation of Feng-yang in Anhwei, his native prefecture, as Middle Capital (Chung-tu) in 1369. Until 1375 there were ceremonies of aggrandizement and flurries of new construction at Feng-yang, and it long continued to be honored; but it never played a functional role in Ming government. Similar honors were later given the city of Ch'eng-t'ien in modern Hu-pei by the Chia-ching emperor (r. 1521–66), who came to the throne unexpectedly from a junior line of imperial descent. Ch'eng-t'ien, his native place and the home of his parents, was given honorific capital status as Hsing-tu, Hsing being the name of his father's princely domain.

Outside the metropolitan areas, China proper in Ming times was divided for administrative purposes into thirteen provinces (*sheng*) along traditional and, for the most part, natural borders. In the chronological order in which they came under Ming control, the provinces were:

1. Chekiang: "the Che River," signifying the drainage area of the river that empties into Hangchow Bay (1362)
2. Kiangsi: "west of the Yangtze" (1365)
3. Hu-kuang: literally, the territory of Tung-t'ing Lake (hu) in the central Yangtze region combined with the Canton (Kuang-chou) region, a name borrowed from Yüan usage even though the Canton region was not included; after Ming times, it was divided into Hu-pei and Hu-nan provinces (1365)
4. Fukien: "Fu-chou and Chien-chou," signifying the region in which these two cities were prominent (1368)
5. Kwangtung: "from Kuang-chou eastward," signifying modern Canton and its eastern hinterland (1368)
6. Kwangsi: "west of Kuang-chou," signifying the western hinterland of Canton (1368)
7. Shantung: "east of the mountains" (1368)
8. Honan: "south of the Yellow River" (1368)
9. Shansi: "west of the mountains" (1368–69)
10. Shensi: "west of the pass" at the sharp eastward bend of the Yellow River toward the North China Plain, extending into modern Kansu (1369)
11. Szechwan: "the four streams," signifying the highland valley dominated by tributaries of the upper Yangtze (1371)
12. Yunnan: "south of the clouds" over Szechwan (1382)
13. Kweichow: "the Kuei prefectures," named after Kuei-yang city and nearby Mount Kuei (1413)

The metropolitan area around Peking was organized as a province named Pei-p'ing from its subjugation in 1368 until 1403, and from 1407 to 1428 Annam (modern North Vietnam) was organized as a Ming province with the old Chinese name Chiao-chih (the land of the "crossed-feet" people, whose feet point in opposite directions according to ancient Chinese legends). Thus, in the early decades of the Ming the number of provinces fluctuated: from three to nine in 1368, to eleven in 1369, to twelve in 1371, to thirteen in 1382, back to twelve in 1403, to thirteen again in 1407, to fourteen in 1413, and finally to thirteen again in 1428. This figure remained unchanged for the rest of the dynasty.

In addition to the pattern of provincial administration in China proper, Ming rulers exercised authority in the frontier marches of the northeast, north, and northwest in a different pattern: one of military jurisdictions called defense areas (*chen*) or frontiers (*p'ien*) that, to some extent, overlapped provincial jurisdictions, but, for the most part, applied only beyond China proper.

There were repeated rearrangements of these zones in the early decades of the Ming, but the mature system included the following nine defense areas stretching from Manchuria, along the northern borders of China proper, westward into Inner Asia:

1. Liaotung: from the Korean frontier at the Yalu River to Shan-hai Pass, where the mountains of North China meet the North China Sea;
2. Chi-chou: from Shan-hai Pass, westward to the region north of Peking;
3. Hsüan-fu: northwest of Peking;
4. Ta-t'ung: along the northeastern border of Shansi province;
5. Shansi (not to be confused with the province): along the western border of Shansi to the Yellow River; also known as P'ien-t'ou or San-kuan;
6. Yen-Sui or Yü-lin: in northern Shensi, facing the Ordos within the great northern bend of the Yellow River;
7. Ningsia: westward, from the north-flowing Yellow River, across north-eastern Kansu;
8. Ku-yüan: south of Ningsia, well within the Great Wall line, blocking a favorite path of nomadic trekking from the Ordos region, to the Tibetan foothills; situated so as to give support as needed to the Yen-Sui, Ningsia, and Kansu areas;
9. Kansu: northwest of Shensi, more or less equivalent to modern Kansu province, with important bases at Kan-chou and Su-chou.

In the Hung-wu reign (1368–98), Chinese military authority was manifested even more extensively in the north: there was a K'ai-p'ing Defense Area based at the old Yüan extramural capital, Shang-tu, north of Hsüan-fu. However, it was decided in 1430 that this installation was too vulnerable to Mon-

gol harassment, and K'ai-p'ing was transferred within the Great Wall line to a base at Pao-ting south of Peking, where it served only as a rear support for the dynastic capital. There was also a Ta-ning Defense Area equally far beyond the Great Wall line in modern Jehol province, but it was abandoned in 1403.²

The Ming provinces were vast areas, several being each as large as England or a large American state. Communication and transportation, although well organized by contemporary European standards, were far from easy. The population was very large, and it grew during Ming times. Official census reports are not reliable and probably considerably understate the actual population figures; but they give some sense of the comparative sizes of the provincial populations (Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1
Reported provincial populations (in millions)

	1393	1491	1578
The Yellow River watershed			
Northern metropolitan area	1.926	3.424	3.422
Shantung	5.255	6.759	5.664
Honan	1.912	4.360	5.193
Shansi	4.072	4.360	5.319
Shensi	2.316	3.912	4.502
The Yangtze River watershed			
Southern metropolitan area	10.755	9.298	10.497
Chekiang	10.487	5.305	5.153
Kiangsi	8.982	6.549	5.859
Hu-kuang	4.702	3.781	4.398
Szechwan	1.466	2.598	3.012
The far south and southwest			
Fukien	3.916	2.016	1.738
Kwangtung	3.007	1.817	5.400
Kwangsi	1.482	1.676	1.186
Yunnan	0.259	0.125	1.476
Kweichow	—	0.258	0.290
Totals:	60.537	56.238	63.109

Source: Ming shih, ch. 40–46. It is commonly thought that the 1393 figures may be reasonably correct, but that later figures are seriously misleading – that, by 1600, the actual total population had grown well over 100 million and perhaps closer to 200 million.

Administration of these large areas and populations was made possible by the perpetuation, in Ming times, of the regional and local administrations of earlier times. In descending order of size and importance these were:

² The Ming Defense Areas are discussed in detail in *TMHT*, ch. 129–30, and by the Ming official, Wei Huan (ca. 1529), in *Chiu pien k'ao*, an abridgement of which is in *Ming-tai pien-fang*, Vol. 6 of *Ming shih lun ts'ung* (Taipei, 1968), pp. 33–112.

prefectures (*fu*), sub-prefectures (*chou*), and counties (*hsien*). The official history of the Ming, compiled under the dynasty's Manchu conquerors, lists 159 prefectures, 240 sub-prefectures, and 1,144 counties.³ These are late Ming totals; the numbers fluctuated throughout the dynasty as areas were upgraded or downgraded in status and as units of local administration were created or abolished. In Chekiang province, for example, there were eleven prefectures, only one sub-prefecture, and seventy-five districts. The prefecture from which the province was administered, Hang-chou fu (Hangchow), was subdivided into nine counties. An average prefect (*chih-fu*) would, in theory, have supervised some 600,000 people occupying some 10,000 square miles, and one of his subordinate county magistrates (*chih-hsien*) would have governed some 90,000 people spread across a jurisdiction of some 1,300 square miles. There was no lower unit in the formal administrative hierarchy than a county.

As in other periods of China's premodern history, cities and towns had no special status in the Ming governmental system, although they were commonly well defined by walls with several gates that were locked from dusk to dawn. For example, the *yamens* or offices of the various agencies that constituted the provincial government of Chekiang, as well as the headquarters of the Hangchow prefect, were located in the large city of Hangchow, which had a resident population within the city walls of perhaps one million. Administration of the walled city itself, however, was shared by the magistrates of the two counties of Ch'ien-t'ang and Jen-ho, each of whom had jurisdiction over an area that spread from within the city walls, well into the surrounding countryside. More particularized urban administrations were provided only for the capital cities Peking and Nanking, both being subdivided, not merely into counties, but also into five wards (*ch'eng*), each with a warden's Office (*ping-ma chih-hui ssu*) that supervised police patrols and fire watchers. At the other extreme, particularly as the population grew and some villages developed into urban centers, there were many towns that were not the seats of even a county magistrate and that had little direct contact with the magistrate of the county in which they were located. In rural villages everywhere, not only was it proverbially true that "As Heaven is high, so is the emperor far away," but no county magistrate ever visited them. In both cities and villages, much government business was necessarily left in the hands of nongovernment groups. (See the discussion of sub-county organization below.)

3 MS, 40, pp. 881–83. Other estimates give totals of 1,159 and 1,169 counties. Some Ming historians translate *hsien* as "districts." However this causes many ambiguities.

THE PERSONNEL OF GOVERNMENT

The government supported by the Ming population, including all categories of persons who received stipends from state revenues, was small in relation to the population, but enormous in absolute terms: undoubtedly the largest such societal superstructure existing in the world at the time. Its principal components were the emperor, his household, and his clan members; a privileged group of noblemen; civil service officials and their subofficial clerical and menial helpers; and a military corps of officers and soldiers.

*The emperor, his household, and his clansmen**The emperor*

Excluding the princely claimants who presided over fragmentary loyalist regimes in the south in the early years of the following Ch'ing dynasty, sixteen men successively ruled over the Ming empire during the 277 years from 1368 to 1644. All emperors after the founding reign were descendants of the first Ming emperor. Of these fifteen, eleven came to the throne as the eldest surviving sons of imperial fathers, two as brothers, one as eldest son of a prematurely dead eldest son, and one as a cousin. In Ming practice, the throne was supposed to pass through the line of the eldest son by the emperor's principal consort or empress. Variations were allowed only when the designated heir died prematurely without a son. This principle was observed except when the Yung-lo emperor (r. 1403–24) usurped the throne from his nephew. Even then, since the Yung-lo emperor was the eldest surviving son of the founding emperor after 1398, it could be argued that the principle was not seriously violated by his usurpation.⁴

The longest Ming reign was that of the Wan-li emperor, who ruled for forty-eight years from 1572 to 1620; the shortest was that of his son the T'ai-ch'ang emperor, who ruled for only one month in 1620. By Chinese reckoning, which counts every calendar year in which one lives as a year of one's age (*shui*), eight emperors came to the throne as minors, the youngest at the age of nine. The oldest was forty-seven at the time of his enthronement. None lived longer than the founding emperor, who died at the age of seventy-one, and the earliest death of a reigning emperor (the T'ien-ch'i emperor, r. 1620–27) came at the age of twenty-three.

4 The dynastic principles of succession were spelled out in Ming Ta'i-tsu, *Huang Ming tsu hsün* (*Ancestral injunctions*), a work revised several times from 1373 to 1395. The 1395 edition is found in Volume 3 of the 1966 Taipei reprint of *Ming ch'ao k'ai kuo wen hsien* and in the 1966–67 Tokyo reprint of *Huang Ming chib shu*. See Wolfgang Franke, *An introduction to the sources of Ming history* (Singapore, 1968), 6.2.12 and 6.1.5. For a discussion of this issue see *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 1*, Vol. 7, eds. Frederick W. Mote and Denis C. Twitchett *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 177–78.

All Ming emperors bore the same family name, Chu. Their individual given names were not used; the characters constituting them were officially tabooed during the emperor's life, with some exceptions in cases of very common, unavoidable characters. The title here rendered emperor was the traditional semi-theocratic term *huang-ti*, but emperors were never so addressed. They were addressed directly with the term *pi-hsia*, which literally means "under the steps" of the dais from which the ruler gave audience, and implies that the speaker dared not speak directly to the ruler. When living, emperors were referred to indirectly by a number of traditional terms, most formally as *shang*, "the superior." Posthumously they were granted elaborate laudatory epithets: for example, Respector of Heaven, Embodiment of the Way, Pure in Sincerity, Perfect in Virtue, Extensive in Culture, Dominant in Militancy, Standard of Sageliness, Thorough in Filial Piety, Luminous Emperor (*Ching-t'ien t'i-tao ch'un-ch'eng chih-te hung-wen ch'in-wu, chang-sheng ta-hsiao chao huang-ti*) was the posthumous epithet of the Hung-hsi emperor, who reigned for only a year in 1424–25. Emperors were also granted posthumous temple designations that were used by their descendants in ancestral worship; these were, in theory, descriptive designations such as Grand Progenitor (T'ai-tsu), Filial Ancestor (Hsiao-tsung), Martial Ancestor (Wu-tsung), and the like. These are the names most commonly used to refer to them in subsequent Chinese writings. They were also sometimes referred to by the names given to their magnificent mausoleums; the Filial Piety Tomb (*Hsiao-ling*) of the Hung-wu emperor outside Nanking or the Longevity Tomb (*Ch'ang-ling*) of the Yung-lo emperor, the first of the thirteen tombs of Ming emperors built west of Peking, in a complex that is familiar to all modern tourists.⁵

The names by which emperors are referred to in this work are not personal names in any sense, but are names that emperors, on taking the throne, proclaimed for their reign periods (*nien-hao*), with such auspicious meanings as Eternal Happiness (Yung-lo), Correct Virtue (Cheng-te), Admirable Tranquility (Chia-ching), and the like. In prior dynasties, such era-names were commonly changed from time to time during any one reign in the hope of changing the flow of events advantageously, or to commemorate some auspicious event. The Ming founding emperor, however, never changed his original era-name, Hung-wu (Expanding Militancy), and his successors followed this precedent. Even though era-names normally came into effect only at the beginning of the year following their promulgation, era-names correspond well enough to the actual reign periods of Ming emper-

⁵ For detailed biographies of all the Ming emperors, see DMB and *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Motte and Twitchett.

ors that they are commonly used, especially by non-Chinese, as if they were personal names.

Palace women

The emperors took as many consorts and concubines as they pleased, but only one at a time could bear the designation empress (*huang-hou*). Occasionally, but not commonly, empresses fell from favor, were demoted to a lower status, and were replaced by other palace women, especially if the original empress had failed to bear a son. The mother of a reigning emperor was entitled empress dowager (*huang t'ai-hou*), the grandmother grand empress dowager (*t'ai-huang t'ai-hou*).

The founding emperor expressed concern about the possibility of "female-disasters" of the sort that had troubled some earlier dynasties, as when empress Wu actually usurped the throne in T'ang times. He had a metal plaque installed in the inner quarters of the palace warning against interference in government by palace women, and in practice the court was probably less troubled by palace women in Ming times than was the case in any other major dynasty. Nevertheless, there were some strong and influential Ming empresses, beginning with empress Ma, a commoner and orphan, who became the principal wife of the founding emperor early in his career, when he was a minor leader in an anti-Mongol uprising at Feng-yang. She is credited with advising her husband wisely during his rise from rebel to emperor and with restraining his immoderate fits of anger as emperor until her death in 1382.

Another influential empress was empress Chang, widow of the Hung-hsi emperor (r. 1424–25), mother of the Hsüan-te emperor (r. 1425–35), and grandmother of Ying-tsung (r. 1435–49 as the Cheng-t'ung emperor and 1457–64 as the T'ien-shun emperor). When the Hsüan-te emperor died in 1435, his heir was just over seven years old (nine *sui*). No provision had been made in Ming law for carrying on government with a child on the throne, and empress Chang (now grand empress dowager) ably took charge of affairs as the prime decision-maker in an unofficial regency council that included influential eunuchs and court officials. Until her death in 1442, she dominated government from the inner quarters of the palace, unobtrusively, but so effectively, that historians have considered the early years of Ying-tsung's first reign a period of stable good government.

Similarly, when the Wan-li emperor (r. 1572–1620) came to the throne at the age of nine, his mother, as empress dowager Li, disciplined him sternly, supported, and at times guided the reformist grand secretary, Chang Chü-cheng (1525–82), in his role as a kind of de facto regent, and she tried with some success to curb the mature emperor's inappropriate impulses until her

own death in 1614. Even the most notoriously influential palace woman of Ming history, the Wan-li emperor's favorite consort, Cheng (1568?–1630), was unsuccessful in her decades-long conniving to have her son chosen as successor to the throne.⁶

Secondary wives of the Ming emperors, who probably numbered six or more at any time according to the slim historical evidence left about them, bore such designations as *fei*, *pin*, and *fu-jen*, all of which might be understood as consort. They were ordinarily differentiated by prefixes. *Huang kuei-fei* (imperial honored consort) seems to have been the most prestigious of these titles; others included *kuei-fei* (honored consort), *hui-fei* (gracious consort), *hsien-fei* (worthy consort), *shu-fei* (pure consort), *k'ang-p'in* (wholesome consort), *kung-feng fu-jen* (consort for reverent service), and the like. The Ming dynasty, unlike some of its predecessors, does not seem to have had a clearly defined set of titles having official ranks, or a rank-ordered set of such titles.⁷

One reason for the imperial wives' relative lack of influence on government was that they were originally chosen from undistinguished families. Most came from commoner households or from the families of junior military officers. When they were about the age of puberty, they were nominated by local officials as virtuous, beautiful, and well-mannered at the beginning of each reign, or subsequently, on demand. Some came as gifts from friendly foreign rulers, chiefly Koreans and Mongols. The normal pattern was for girls of these sorts to enter palace service in lowly stations and then, if they were fortunate enough to catch the emperor's fancy, to be promoted to the status of secondary wife or even empress. Once a palace woman won such favor, her father and her brothers were normally granted stipends and titles in the hierarchy of military officers. Specially esteemed consorts occasionally, and empresses regularly, won for their closest kinsmen status in the nobility; but in 1529 it was ordered that the noble status of such imperial in-laws could no longer be transmitted hereditarily.⁸ In sum, the Ming practice was for the honor and status of imperial in-laws to be derived from, and dependent on, the favor enjoyed by their female relatives in the palace; it was not the practice for emperors to marry into families that had independent, established prestige, which could (as in earlier times) exert abusive pressures on the throne or threaten the dynasty's continuity.

6 See the biographies of Ma (Empress), Chu Ch'i-chen, Li-shih, Chang Chü-cheng, and Cheng kuei-fei in *DMB*; and in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, chap. 9.

7 In its lists and biographies of palace women, *MS*, ch. 113–14, contradicts its introductory statement that only eight *fei* titles were used.

8 *MS*, 76, pp. 1855–56. See also *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 461–63.

In the early Ming reigns, it was customary, as in Yüan times, for secondary wives to commit suicide (or be murdered?) at the death of their emperor so as to accompany him in burial. The custom also prevailed in the households of imperial princes. "Many" or perhaps "most" of the Hung-wu emperor's consorts reportedly died in this way, and at the deaths of the Hung-chih and Hsüan-te emperors in 1425 and 1435, ten consorts so died in each case. But in Ying-tsung's last testament of 1464 this practice was declared uncivilized, and it was terminated.⁹ It was clearly more common, throughout the dynasty, for consorts to be retained in the palace until death, even as honored pensioners in following reigns.

In addition to empresses and secondary wives, the Ming imperial palace housed a large number of other women in service roles, who were referred to as female officials (*nü-kuan*). Part of the Hung-wu emperor's plan to avoid "female disasters" was to establish a maximum limit of a hundred such attendants, and his household staff had only ninety-three positions for women. By the 1420s, however, these restrictions were being ignored, and especially in the last century of the dynasty, the number of palace women soared. The great K'ang-hsi emperor (r. 1661–1722) of the succeeding Ch'ing dynasty complained that, in the last decades of the Ming, palace women numbered 9,000.¹⁰ His figure may have been exaggerated for propaganda purposes, but reliable records show that young women were not uncommonly recruited for palace service in groups of three hundred during the last Ming reigns. The recruitment procedure was essentially the same as that used to recruit consorts, since any palace woman was a potential consort.

While in palace service, all women were carefully sequestered. Their seclusion was so tight, the *Official history* reports, that the death penalty was prescribed for any private communication by letter with an outsider. When a palace woman fell ill, although medications were sought in accordance with reported symptoms, no physician was allowed to enter the palace to treat her.¹¹ On the other hand, women were released or dismissed from palace service reasonably freely. Some were awarded to favored dignitaries as imperial gifts, to be treasured concubines. After long service, others were sent home to their families with retirement pensions. A general rule was established in 1389 that after five or six years of meritorious service a female official could return to her family free to marry.¹²

Female officials and the female clerks (*nü-shih*) who assisted them, theoretically numbering seventy-five and eighteen respectively after 1372, were organized into six major groups according to their assigned duties, each group

9 *MS*, 113, pp. 3515–16.

11 *MS*, 113, p. 3504.

10 Ting I, *Ming tai t'ê wu cheng chih* (Peking, 1950), p. 24.

12 *MS*, 74, pp. 1827–29.

being subdivided into four sub-groups. The major groups were the General Palace Service (*shang-kung chü*), which supervised all others, the Ceremonial Service (*shang-i chü*), the Wardrobe Service (*shang-fu chü*), the Housekeeping Service (*shang-ch'in chü*), and the Workshop Service (*shang-kung chü*). In addition, there was an Office of Palace Surveillance (*kung-cheng ssu*) charged with maintaining discipline among all the palace women. This neat arrangement of offices was not always adhered to; variant nomenclature abounded in reference to palace women. As their numbers grew, their functions seem to have become less well defined. Palace eunuchs seem to have taken charge of the everyday functioning of the palace, and most of the palace women, no doubt, were merely maidservants and companions for their seniors, who, in turn, were maidservants and companions for the empress and for the secondary wives of the emperor.¹³

Eunuchs

Palace eunuchs (*huan-kuan*) were even more numerous than palace women, and they often played prominent roles in Ming history. The founding emperor expressed more concern about the possibility of “eunuch disasters” of the sort that had troubled earlier dynasties than about the threat of “female disasters.” He set up placards in the palace threatening to decapitate eunuchs who involved themselves in government affairs, and on at least one occasion, he angrily dismissed from the palace an old eunuch with a long record of faithful service because the eunuch had been overheard making an insignificant, passing reference to government business. The emperor insisted on keeping his eunuch staff small and on keeping eunuchs illiterate so as to minimize their opportunities to influence government. However, he failed to honor his own restrictions consistently. The Yung-lo emperor (r. 1402–24) relied extensively on eunuchs to carry out important government missions; and later emperors consistently ignored the founder’s warnings about eunuchs. In the reign of the Ch’eng-hua emperor (r. 1464–87), there were complaints that the eunuch staff exceeded 10,000. The Wan-li emperor (r. 1572–1620) recruited eunuchs in groups of 3,000 or more, and post-Ming critics claimed that, in the late Ming years, Peking swarmed with 70,000 eunuchs and that there was a grand total of 30,000 others in various establishments throughout the empire.¹⁴ It is possible that a more reliable figure is 12,000 for the palace at Peking, an estimate heard in 1626 by the Jesuit missionary Alvaro Semedo, who personally judged that “for the most part their number is very little

¹³ *MS*, 74, pp. 1827–29.

¹⁴ Ting I, *Ming tai t’i wu cheng chib*, pp. 22–6.

greater; or less.”¹⁵ No one can be sure, since records of such matters were never made public.

Eunuchs were, of course, castrated males. In the Chinese tradition all external genitals were completely removed in a very dangerous operation. Although in high antiquity, castration was not an uncommon state punishment, it was not on the regular schedule of punishments in Ming times. Ming eunuchs, for the most part, came from families in the lower strata of society that had a surplus of male offspring and voluntarily had a male child castrated for presentation to the palace. Such offerings were always rewarded, and the families could hope for future benefits if their sons gained favor in imperial service. In some instances, kinsmen of eunuchs were given official appointments or even status in the nobility.

For adult males to have themselves castrated was a violation of Ming law that successive emperors regularly fulminated against, but adult self-castration seems to have provided some eunuchs for palace service. The Ming palace seems not to have performed castration operations even on willing candidates for service, but all recruits, in Semedo's words, were carefully inspected to make sure “that they wholly want that, which they pretend to have lost, and that they be completely castrated; and moreover, every fourth year, they are visited, lest any thing should grow out again, which hath not been well taken away.”¹⁶

Eunuchs were an accepted part of China's palace establishments from high antiquity into the twentieth century. In a polygamous society, rulers were naturally reluctant to permit normal males to have ready access to the residential quarters of the palace; yet there were essential needs to be fulfilled that could safely be entrusted to eunuchs: service as menials, maintenance workers, valets, or even as non-female confidants among whom rulers could relax and amuse themselves, away from the burdensome formalities that cluttered their ordinary hours. Many eunuchs seem to have provided such service faithfully, loyally, efficiently, and unobtrusively; it was not uncommon for well-intentioned officials of the central government to seek the help of eunuchs in influencing emperors' policies. In cases of either very strong-willed or very reclusive emperors, the pattern of Ming government made it almost mandatory for smooth, amicable linkages to evolve between the officialdom and the eunuch corps if government were to function properly, or at all. Ming history, like that of other periods, does not lack “good” eunuchs.

However, “bad” eunuchs were a serious problem in Ming times. The difficulty was that the Confucian ideology, to which the Ming state was com-

15 C. Alvarez Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, trans. from Italian (London, 1655), p. 114.

16 C. Alvarez Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, p. 116.

mitted, made no provision for eunuchs to have any legitimate role other than that of palace servants. Eunuchs were not characteristically trained in the Confucian value system; they were responsible to no one but the emperor; and, on balance, they had nothing to gain except by catering to the emperor's every whim. The Confucian-indoctrinated official class could not but resent emperors relying on trusted eunuchs to undertake tasks outside the palace that concerned state affairs. Yet Ming emperors relied on their eunuchs regularly, beginning with the founding emperor himself. Eunuchs were employed as special investigators, special tax collectors, directors of state-operated manufactories, envoys to foreign rulers, and supervisors of foreign trade, and even as military commanders. The single most famous Ming eunuch, Cheng Ho (1371–1433), led armadas into the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean seven times between 1405 and 1433, controlling hundreds of ships and expeditionary forces numbering in the tens of thousands.¹⁷ The Wan-li emperor (r. 1572–1620) seems to have felt he could administer the empire better with eunuch agents than with moralistic, self-righteous, argumentative Confucian literati.

Employment of eunuchs outside the palace in these ways almost came to be a normal part of government in Ming times, however contrary this practice was to the dynastic ideology. "Eunuch disasters" arose only when young or weak emperors permitted themselves to be dominated and manipulated by strong and unscrupulous eunuchs, who, in turn, could be used by opportunists in the civil and military services to further their selfish, partisan interests. At such times, the normal functioning of government could seriously be disrupted and men of strong Confucian principles could be disillusioned, disadvantaged, and harmed even more severely. Thus, the emperor Ying-tsung's first reign came to disaster in the T'u-mu incident of 1449, when, under the influence of the eunuch, Wang Chen, the emperor vaingloriously led a military campaign that resulted in a rout by Mongols, the capture and captivity of the emperor, and the deaths of many eminent court officials.¹⁸ Subsequently, the eunuchs Wang Chih in the 1470s, Liu Chin in the early 1500s, and Wei Chung-hsien in the 1620s, all gained notoriously abusive power, and conscientious officials suffered at their hands.

Palace eunuchs were organized in twenty-four agencies: these comprised twelve directorates (*chien*), four offices (*ssu*), and eight services (*chü*), with assigned responsibilities that historical materials do not make entirely clear.¹⁹ The most prestigious eunuchs were the Directors (*t'ai-chien*) of the

17 On Cheng Ho, see *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 322–31.

18 On the T'u-mu incident, see *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 319–31.

19 *MS*, 74, pp. 1818–27.

twelve Directorates, and most prestigious of all was the Director of Ceremonial (*ssu-li t'ai-chien*), who was de facto chief of the imperial household staff. It was through this office that eunuchs repeatedly gained dictatorial powers within the palace. Another important eunuch office, outside the twenty-four basic agencies, was the Eunuch Rectification Office (*nei-cheng ssu*), charged with taking disciplinary action against eunuchs who misbehaved. Eunuchs also managed the granaries and storehouses that constituted the Palace Treasury (*nei-fu*), various commissariats, workshops, and gateways into and within the palace grounds. In 1429 the Hsüan-te emperor formally established a eunuch school (*nei shu-t'ang*) in direct violation of the founding emperor's wish to keep eunuchs illiterate, but this merely regularized a practice already several years old. Here, boy eunuchs were educated by scholarly officials, and soon eunuchs in a Palace Secretariat (*chung-shu fang* or *wen-shu fang*) were processing the emperor's paperwork as confidential secretaries. Eventually, in violation of centuries-old traditions, palace edicts (*chung-chih*) were issued by eunuchs without being proposed, drafted, or even seen in advance by court officials. In 1552, eunuch groups began military drills inside the palace despite protests from officials, and in the 1620s there was a palace army of eunuchs that became the last Ming emperor's only remaining defense force when rebels overran the capital and palace in 1644.

The most feared and vilified eunuch agencies were secret police-like offices innocuously called the Eastern Depot (*tung-ch'ang*), established by the Yung-lo emperor in 1420, and the Western Depot (*hsi-ch'ang*), added by the Ch'eng-hua emperor in 1477. Working under the supervision of the eunuch Director of Ceremonial and in close collaboration with the Imperial Bodyguard (*chin-i wei*), eunuchs of these agencies were authorized to ferret out and punish traitors anywhere in the empire; and it was through them that such eunuchs as Wang Chih, Liu Chin, and Wei Chung-hsien mounted and presided over reigns of terror that are among the worst blemishes on the record of Ming governance.

The imperial clan

The Ming emperors were magnanimous in the treatment of their kinsmen. Not only immediate members of the imperial family, but all descendants of the emperors in the male line, almost in perpetuity, male and female alike, so long as they bore the imperial surname Chu, were considered royalty and received stipends from state funds. After many generations their number naturally swelled. Semedo estimated that by the 1620s they totaled 60,000 or so,²⁰ and modern scholars have estimated that in the last years of the Ming

20 C. Alvarez Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, p. 122.

there were probably 100,000 imperial kinsmen on the state payroll: a massive fiscal burden. It has been calculated that in 1562, when total land tax revenues submitted to the central government were the equivalent of four million bushels of grain, revenues diverted to scattered imperial princes alone were the equivalent of more than eight million bushels; and in one province, Shansi, where land tax revenues retained for support of the provincial, prefectural, and county administrations were the equivalent of one and a half million bushels, revenues earmarked for allocation to resident members of the imperial clan were more than the equivalent of two million bushels.²¹ In 1591, one county in Shansi province is reported to have disbursed from 39 to 49 percent of its total tax receipts for the support of the imperial clansmen: this was the largest single category of the county's disbursements.²² Even taking into account that land tax disbursements for imperial clansmen were always a heavier burden in North China than in South China, the imperial clan's drain of state resources on a national scale cannot have been inconsequential.

The Ming practice was to consider all males born to secondary wives as legitimate as those borne by the empress, and all formally referred to the empress as their mother. The emperors were quite prolific, none more so than the founding emperor, who spawned twenty-six sons and sixteen daughters. One later emperor had nineteen children, another had eighteen, and two had seventeen each. Only two emperors seem to have died without issue.

By custom, an emperor's first-born son by his empress was designated heir apparent (*t'ai-tzu*) at an age no later than that at which he could appropriately begin to be taught to read and write. Although the first-born son had no legally enforceable right to the succession, he normally succeeded to the throne in due course. In a notorious instance of procrastination in this regard, the Wan-li emperor (r. 1572–1620) infuriated his court officials by stubbornly refusing to designate an heir. The eventual successor was in his twentieth year, unconscionably late by Ming standards, when the emperor relented and named him heir apparent, thereby offending his favorite consort, who even thereafter did not abandon her machinations to secure the succession for her own son.²³ Proper and timely designation of a successor was considered so vital to dynastic stability that the heir's status was commonly referred to as the root-like basis, or foundation, of the state (*kuo-pen*).

The heir was quartered, together with his staff of female and eunuch attendants and his wives and children, as time wore on, in a section of the imperial palace called the Eastern Palace (*tung-kung*). His training was entrusted to a

21 Wu Han, *Ch'üan-chang chuan* (Shanghai, 1949), pp. 262–63.

22 Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century Ming China* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 178, table 10.

23 See Mote and Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, pp. 516, 554–55.

special civil service agency called the Household Administration of the Heir Apparent (*chan-shih fu*) and its subsidiary Left and Right Secretariats of the Heir Apparent (*ch'un-fang*), all staffed with respected scholar-officials.²⁴ Part of the Heir Apparent's training in preparation for his accession was to serve as Protector of the State (*chien-kuo*), normally with very limited powers, whenever the emperor journeyed away from the capital. When so serving, the heir usually presided over a committee of specially designated officials in whom the emperor placed great trust.

All male offspring of an emperor other than the heir were entitled to the designation imperial prince (*ch'in-wang*). As in some preceding dynasties, they were normally not permitted to remain residents of the imperial palace beyond the age of puberty, lest they be tempted into improper relations with the palace women, or into intrigues to disrupt the succession, or to otherwise interfere in government affairs. In their early teens, consequently, palaces were prepared for them in cities away from the capital; they were given geographic prefixes accordingly in patterns deriving from the names of ancient feudal states (Prince of Ch'i, Prince of Chin, Prince of Ch'u, and the like). They "went to their fiefs" (*chih-kuo*) with state stipends equivalent to 10,000 bushels of grain per year. When the Hung-wu emperor first dispersed his sons in this fashion, he distributed them across North China and, as they matured, gave them viceregal powers to control the military forces along the northern frontier. This led to the rebellion of the Prince of Yen in 1399, after the founding emperor's death brought a grandson to the throne, and culminated in the prince's successful usurpation to become the Yung-lo emperor (r. 1402–24).²⁵ As emperor, he not only moved the dynastic capital north to his own power base at Peking; he also redistributed princes into the interior of China proper and stripped them of their former military powers. Thereafter, imperial princes were no more than symbolic representatives of the majesty of the throne in the areas of their residence. Like other members of the imperial clan, they were forbidden to hold office or to undertake any government activity, civil or military. They were not even permitted to leave their assigned cities of residence except by order or permission of the emperor.

Since the sons of all Ming emperors except the successive heirs became imperial princes and passed such status on undiminished to their heirs, their number steadily increased. At least sixty-one princeships were created in the dynasty's history, but not all were perpetuated to the end of the dynasty. In the 1400s each princeship came to have an "estate" composed of lands from which land tax revenues were diverted to provide the prince's stipend, but over which the prince had no direct control. In each case there was also a

²⁴ *MS*, 73, pp. 1783–85.

²⁵ See *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 193–202.

civil service Princely Establishment (*wang-fu*) headed by an Administrator (*chang-shih*), rank 5a (see below), who was responsible to the central government not only for the proper functioning of the prince's household, but also for the prince's personal conduct. When a prince misbehaved, it was his civil service administrator who was normally punished as a scapegoat.²⁶ Each prince also was attended by two military units, an escort guard (*hu-wei*) for security and a ceremonial guard (*i-wei*) for pomp.²⁷

The eldest son of each imperial prince by the principal wife, on attaining the age of ten, was formally designated heir (*shih-tzu*), and normally he eventually succeeded to his father's status. Every other son was awarded the lesser title commandery prince (*chiün-wang*), which was similarly perpetuated from eldest son to eldest son. However, automatic perpetuation of princely status terminated at this level. Junior sons of commandery princes and their male descendants in successive generations, including eldest sons, were awarded the successively less prestigious titles defender-general of the state (*chen-kuo Chiang-chiün*), bulwark-general of the state (*fu-kuo Chiang-chiün*), supporter-general of the state (*feng-kuo Chiang-chiün*), defender-commandant of the state (*chen-kuo chung-wei*), bulwark-commandant of the state (*fu-kuo chung-wei*), and supporter-commandant of the state (*feng-kuo chung-wei*). The last of these titles, with a prescribed state stipend of only 200 bushels of grain annually, was awarded to all males descended in male lines from emperors to the eighth and all later generations, excluding those who continued to inherit the prestigious titles of imperial prince and commandery prince.²⁸ All were forbidden to hold functioning offices in government and to engage in agriculture. Some saved themselves from being mere ornaments of state by developing literary or artistic talents or by taking part unobtrusively in the growing mercantile activity that China experienced in the sixteenth century. Because the imperial clansmen grew so numerous and were such manifestly useless pensioners, it was finally allowed that they compete for official careers through civil service recruitment examinations, beginning in 1595, with the proviso that imperial clansmen could never be appointed to offices at the capital.²⁹

Women of the imperial clan were also given special titles and stipends, but not as extensively as males. Paternal aunts of a reigning emperor were entitled princesses supreme (*ta-chang kung-chu*), the sisters grand princesses (*chang kung-chu*), and the daughters, imperial princesses (*kung-chu*). All received stipends equivalent to 2,000 bushels of grain annually, and their husbands were all ennobled as commandant-escorts (*fu-ma tu-wei*), a higher rank of nobility than earl (*po*). The daughters of imperial princes were entitled commandery princesses (*chiün-chu*); those of commandery princes were entitled county

²⁶ *MS*, 75, pp. 1836–38. ²⁷ *MS*, 76, pp. 1865.

²⁸ *MS*, 116, p. 3557. ²⁹ *MHY*, 4, pp. 16a–17a.

princesses (*hsien-chu*); those of defender-generals of the state were entitled commandery mistresses (*chün-chün*); those of bulwark-generals of the state were entitled district mistresses (*hsien-chün*); and those of supporter-generals of the state were entitled township mistresses (*hsiang-chün*). These lesser clanswomen were granted annual stipends, the highest amount being eight hundred bushels of grain. Their husbands were all entitled ceremonial companions (*i-pin*). The daughters of lesser members of the imperial clan (that is, those beyond the sixth generation of descent from an emperor) were not ennobled; and the children of all imperial clanswomen, whether male or female, were not ennobled because they took surnames from their fathers. Not bearing the imperial surname Chu, they could not be considered members of the imperial clan. Males in female lines of descent from an emperor, especially those not removed by more than two generations from an emperor, were commonly favored with appointments as supernumerary military officers or with state stipends, but such treatment was not their birthright.³⁰

The jade register (*yü-tieh*) in which the complex genealogical records of all these members of the imperial clan were kept was in the care of the Court of the Imperial Clan (*tsung-jen fu*). This was nominally a civil service agency staffed with a director (*ling*), two associate directors (*tsung-cheng*), and two assistant directors (*tsung-jen*), but it was actually staffed with imperial princes, husbands of imperial princesses, or other ennobled relatives by marriage of the emperor, all concurrently holding the highest civil service rank. All marriages of members of the imperial clan had to be approved by this office, and it tried to keep an accurate record of all births, deaths, and inheritance rights within the clan. Some of the office's functions were gradually taken over by the Ministry of Rites in the central government.³¹

The nobility

The non-imperial nobility in Ming times consisted of men who were awarded the traditional titles duke (*kung*), marquis (*hou*), and earl (*po*), in recognition of their illustrious service to the state. The lesser titles baron (*nan*) and viscount (*tzü*) were awarded only during the first reign. Noble titles normally had geographic prefixes, but the Duke of Liang (Liang-kuo kung) and the Marquis of Hui-ning (Hui-ning hou), for example, had no necessary connection with the places from which their titles derived. Neither did they have landed estates. Like members of the imperial clan, they had state stipends, in these cases, not following any general schedules but fixed individually at the time of appointment. Whether or not noble status was inheritable was simi-

30 MS, 121, p. 3661. 31 MS, 72, p. 1730.

larly determined in each case at the time of the original appointment. The nobility, thus, did not constitute an independent power-wielding element in society.

Except in the earliest years of the dynasty, noble status was awarded almost exclusively in recognition of military achievements. The role of nobles was to adorn the court, take part in court deliberations and ceremonials when invited, and, when called on, to command military forces on campaign or perform other specific, temporary functions. Individual nobles were sometimes prominent in public affairs, but the nobility as a group was not an influential element in government.

The successive Ming emperors appointed a total of twenty-one dukes, 102 marquises, and 138 earls. More than half of these titles were not hereditary, and only a few of the rest were perpetuated for more than three generations.³²

The civil service

At no time in China's premodern history was government in all its aspects more dominated by civil servants recruited and promoted on the basis of merit than in Ming times.³³ The civil service was no doubt less prestigious *vis-à-vis* the emperor than it had been in Sung times, but among the groups in the Ming emperor's service – even taking into account the abusive intrusions into government by palace eunuchs and the honors accorded members of the imperial clan and the nobility – the civil service on balance was the unchallengeably supreme instrument with which the emperors administered the empire, and individual merit was on balance the unchallengeably paramount criterion for admission to and advancement in the service. The civil service dominated state and society to such an extent that no student of Ming history can afford to be unaware of its workings as a largely self-defining and self-regulating body.

Despite its prominence and importance, the civil service was a relatively small corps. Available statistics in this regard are few and not easy to interpret, but it appears that the number of regular civil officials (*wen-kuan*) increased rapidly from a level of about 5,000 in the earliest Ming years to a level of 24,000 or so in the last years. The latter figure includes some 1,500 members of the central government at Peking.³⁴ These calculations do not take account

³² *MS*, 76, pp. 1855–56 and ch. 105–07.

³³ The most complete modern explanation of the Ming civil service system is found in Yang Shu-fan, *Chung kuo wen kuan chih tu shih* (Taipei, 1976), pp. 590–683. A more compact summary is in T'ao Hsi-sheng and Shen Jen-yüan, *Ming Ch'ing cheng chih chih tu* (Taipei, 1967), pp. 153–244.

³⁴ A late Ming official stated there were some 5,400 authorized civil positions in the founding emperor's time and 16,000 official personnel in the reign of the Wan-li emperor (r. 1572–1620). See Hsü Tzu,

Footnote continued on next page

of subofficial functionaries, whose status *vis-à-vis* officials was approximately that of noncommissioned personnel *vis-à-vis* officers in a modern army (see below).

Recruitment

There were several “paths” (*t'u*) by which men could gain status as civil officials. Only two of these were considered “regular paths” (*cheng-t'u*): admission to the service by promotion out of the ranks of sub-official functionaries and recruitment through examination. After the early 1440s, success in the examinations was the only means to assure the possibility of a first-class civil service career.

At the beginning of the dynasty, when the founding emperor was rapidly expanding the territory under his control, there was no viable alternative to recruitment by recommendations (*chien-chü*) for staffing his government. As every new region was incorporated into the empire, he called for local notables to recommend qualified men. When possible, he summoned them to his capital for interviews, and then appointed them to positions in the central government, as well as in the regional administrations. It quickly became the rule that local magistrates had to submit annual recommendations. In 1368, special agents were dispatched throughout the emerging empire to seek out potential officials; and in 1370, and again in 1373, special appeals for recommendations were issued. Following ancient traditions, the emperor always requested that men be recommended on the grounds of virtuous conduct and literary accomplishments. Those recommended were regularly described as “intelligent and upright,” “worthy and straightforward,” “filial and incorruptible,” “Confucian scholars,” and so on. Even after a school system was producing graduates who were appointable and a recruitment examination system was well established, it was not until the 1440s that recommendees began to be winnowed by formal qualifying examinations before being accepted for service; whereupon, the path of recommendation to official status disappeared from the recruitment system.³³

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Hsiao *t'ien chi chuan* (Nanking, 1887), 12, pp. 5b–6a. Chi Huang, ed. (*chin ting*) *Hsü Wen hsien t'ung k'ao* (1749), rpt. in Vols 621–31 of *Ying yin Wen yüan kuo Ssu k'u ch'üan shu* (Taipei, 1983), 51, pp. 3254–55, apparently referring to late Ming, gives a total of 24,683 officials including 1,416 at Peking, 558 at Nanking, and 22,709 elsewhere. According to *MSL*, there was a total of 20,400 officials by the early 1500s. All the officials of the empire were listed in an official work entitled *Ta ming kuan chih* which was reissued at intervals. See Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 48. *MS* states that by 1469 the number of military officers surpassed 80,000 and the total of both civil and military officials was more than 100,000. *MS*, 214, cited in Yang Shu-fan, *Chung-kuo wen kuan chih tu shih*, p. 683.

33 *MS*, 71, pp. 1711–15.

The Ming dynasty patronized a widespread array of schools. These included military schools (*wu-hsüeh*), medical schools (*yin-yang hsüeh*), community schools (*she-hsueh*) for elementary education and dynastic indoctrination in rural villages and urban wards, and private academies (*shu-yüan*) where mature scholars gathered for philosophical seminars and where their disciples were prepared to participate in the civil service recruitment examinations. However, a system of wholly subsidized Confucian schools (*ju-hsüeh*) was the most important. Located in counties, sub-prefectures, and prefectures, their purpose was to prepare young men for official careers, in part, by sending graduates for advanced study to the National Universities (*t'ai-hsüeh*) at Peking and Nanking that were maintained by the central government's Directorate of Education (*kuo-tzu hsüeh* until 1382, thereafter *kuo-tzu chien*).³⁶

The government school system was established by the Hung-wu emperor in the second year of his reign, with quotas set for state-supported staff and students. The whole array of Confucian schools at regional and local levels could hardly have been fully operational at any one time, but before the end of the Hung-wu reign, 4,200 instructors were reportedly at work in them, and there is abundant evidence that, throughout the dynasty, the system functioned more or less as intended. After some early fluctuations, the system provided for five instructors and forty "government students" (*sheng-yüan*) in each prefectural school (sixty students in the capital prefectures), four instructors and thirty students in each sub-prefectural school, and three instructors and twenty students in each county school. The authorized number of students was steadily increased, although not all supplementary students received state stipends. In the early 1600s it was reported that large Confucian schools enrolled one or two thousand students and even small ones enrolled as many as seven or eight hundred students.³⁷ There was a prescribed curriculum emphasizing the ancient Four Books and Five Classics, together with a selection of Neo-Confucian writings. Students were regularly examined, not merely by their instructors, but, in addition, by local magistrates, touring censorial inspectors from the central government, and most important, after 1436, by education intendants (*t'ai-hsüeh kuan*) appointed both in metropolitan areas and in every province. These education intendants had the sole assigned duty of visiting the local schools in rotation and of certifying the quality of their students.³⁸ How long individual students remained in the Confucian schools, on average, is not clear, but enrollment for ten years was not uncom-

36 MS, 69, pp. 1675–90. A general analysis of the multifaceted Ming school system appears in Tilemann Grimm, *Erziehung und Politik im konfuzianischen China der Ming-Zeit* (Hamburg, 1961).

37 Lin Li-yüeh, *Ming tai ti kuo tzu chien sheng* (Taipei, 1979), p. 83, n. 135.

38 For a description and evaluation of these important officials, see Tilemann Grimm, "Ming education intendants." In *Chinese Government in Ming Times: Seven Studies*, ed. Charles O. Hucker (New York, 1969), pp. 129–47.

mon. At times, what amounted to honorable discharges were given to students in their fifties.

Confucian schools throughout the country promoted students into the national universities at Peking and Nanking according to fixed quotas. There was some fluctuation in these quotas, but, in general, each prefectural school was required to send two students to the universities every year, each sub-prefectural school three every two years, and each county school one each year. Such promoted students were called tribute students (*kung-sheng*).³⁹ They had to pass entrance tests before being admitted to the universities. If they failed, the responsible school instructors were punished. Since the schools were conservatively inclined to select students for promotion on the basis of seniority, provincial education intendants were authorized to choose exceptionally talented students for promotion into the universities in addition to those presented as tribute students.

If Confucian schools actually existed in all regional and local units of administration and if all of them submitted tribute students according to quota, there would have been a regular annual pool of not fewer than 1,800 candidates for admission to the universities from this source alone. Such can hardly have been the case regularly, but the tribute student system undoubtedly produced the great majority of university students (generally called *ch'ien-sheng*). From the beginning, these students were supplemented by other categories of students. One such group consisted of various "official students" (*kuan-sheng*), primarily sons of nobles and officials. Until 1467 all civil officials of ranks 1 through 7 (that is, all but the most minor officials) were entitled to "protect" (*yin*) one son or grandson each, who became automatically eligible either for direct appointment to office or for enrollment as a university student. From 1467 on, this privilege was restricted to nobles and

39 The sources do not agree about the quotas set for tribute students. The *MS*, 69, p. 1680, reports there were repeated changes in the quotas until "between the Hung-chih (1488-1505) and Chia-ching (1522-66) eras" the quotas mentioned here were fixed and "subsequently became the permanent system." Wang Hung-hsü, et al., *Ming shih kao* (1723; rpt. Taipei, 1963) 71.5b (Vol. 2, p. 195) has an identical text, and the modern scholar Lin Li-yüeh in his *Ming tai ti kuo tzu ch'ien sheng*, p. 13, accepts this data without question. *MS* includes the information that a change in 1441 had set earlier quotas at one tribute student per year for each prefectural school, two students every three years for each sub-prefectural school, and one student every other year for each county school. *TMHT* states that the quotas set in 1441 became permanent. Fu Wei-lin (d. 1667), *Ming shu* (early K'ang-hsi period), rpt. in Vols. 319-68 of *Chi fu ts'ung shu* (Taipei, 1966), 64, p. 1271 (Vol. 5) gives only one set of quotas, those of 1441; and the modern scholars, Tilemann Grimm in his *Erziehung und Politik im konfuzianischen China der Ming-Zeit*, p. 56, and Ho Ping-ti in his *The ladder of success in Imperial China: aspects of social mobility, 1368-1911* (New York, 1962), p. 183, both accept the *TMHT* data without question. No scholar seems to have addressed and resolved this contradiction. The choice of data made here is a tentative one, based on the belief that in matters of this sort, *MS*, a work edited and re-edited by scholars, is likely to be more reliable than *TMHT*, a compilation produced primarily by government clerks.

only the highest ranking central government officials (those with ranks 1 through 3). Even their heirs had to pass qualifying tests and could only be enrolled in the universities, not directly appointed to office.⁴⁰ Official students also included “students by grace” (*en-sheng*): sons of men who had died heroically in battle, and princelings from Korea, Inner Asian tribes, the Ryukyus, and various kingdoms of Southeast Asia who had been sent to be educated in China. Another category of students (*chü-chien* or student-initiates) consisted of men who temporarily dropped out of the sequence of recruitment examinations to prepare more adequately in the universities.

Beginning in 1450, in response to the national emergency created by the Mongol capture of the emperor Ying-tsung at T’u-mu the year before, the Ming government regularly offered university student status in a category known as “students by purchase” (*li-chien*, *li chien-sheng*) to men who made special contributions of grain or horses to the state. The original number of student posts offered for sale was limited to one thousand, but, in the 1500s, tens of thousands of men gained student status in this way, as the government regularly sought extra revenues. Only a small proportion of students by purchase ever took advantage of their opportunities to enroll in the universities; the social esteem derived from such status and the opportunities it afforded for direct appointment to very minor offices were rewards enough for the majority.⁴¹

Once admitted to one of the national universities, students theoretically spent from three to ten years moving through graded stages of study in the six colleges (*t’ang*) into which each university was divided. The curriculum stressed the Four Books, the Five Classics, Neo-Confucian writings, and history. Student progress from college to college depended partly on attendance and partly on performance in regular tests. On completing the prescribed curriculum, students were certified as graduates and sent to the Ministry of Personnel to be considered for official appointments.

The prestige of the universities in the capitals as stepping-stones to official status stayed high well into the 1400s, but then declined, partly because the influx of students by purchase after 1450 lowered the universities’ educational standards, partly because of the flourishing of private academies (*shu-yüan*) as training centers for examination candidates, and partly because of the steadily growing importance and prestige of the recruitment examinations. Whereas enrollment in the Peking universities fluctuated between 5,000 and 10,000

40 *MS*, 69, pp. 1682–84; 72, p. 1735.

41 *MS*, 69, p. 1683. Cf. Ho Ping-ti, *The ladder of success in Imperial China*, p. 33, and Lin Li-yüeh, *Ming tai ti kuo tzu chien sheng*, p. 16.

into the early 1500s,⁴² it plummeted thereafter. In the Wan-li emperor's reign (1572–1620) one head of the Nanking university lamented that enrollment had declined to only 600.⁴³

Of all students admitted to the Peking university from 1545 to 1581, tribute students from the school system accounted for just under 40 percent, students by purchase accounted for 44 percent, 17 percent were students in the recruitment examination sequence, and fewer than 2 percent were official students.⁴⁴

A lessening of prestige is not the only reason for the declining enrollments in the national universities after the early 1400s. From the beginning, it was believed that university students should have opportunities to get practical experience in government as on-the-job novices, probationers, or apprentices (*li-shih*, *li-cheng*, *pan-shih*). The founding emperor called out hundreds of university students at a time to undertake special projects – to stimulate the establishment of community schools, to conduct cadastral surveys, to organize archives in local units of administration, to initiate irrigation-construction projects, and the like. Although some emperors and officials deplored it, the practice soon became regularized, and students were distributed by quota among government agencies, especially in the capital. By the 1500s there were more nominal students serving apprenticeships outside the universities than there were actually in residence. Some apprenticeships had prescribed durations of three months, others six months, others one year, and some as long as three years. On completion of their assignments, some students were required to resume their active student status in the universities, but it was increasingly common for apprenticed students to become immediately eligible for substantive official appointments.⁴⁵ Thus, through the 1500s, the universities gradually became more like certification centers than active educational institutions.

Promotion into the officialdom from status as a subofficial functionary (*li*), though considered a “regular path,” and no doubt a channel through which thousands of men filled the lower ranks of officialdom, was never held in high esteem. Even in the earliest decades of the dynasty, this was not a way to ensure a good civil service career. In their own right, however, functionaries had state-recognized status and state stipends. They were not menial students, but were the specialized technical and clerical personnel who kept

42 Sun Ch'eng-tse, *Ch'un ming meng yü lu* (Early Ch'ing period; rpt. Nan-hai, 1883; rpt. Hong Kong, 1965), 54, pp. 20b–21a, cites enrollment figures of 9,884 in 1421, 4,893 in 1429, 4,426 in 1449, 5,179 in 1454, 5,833 in 1464, 6,028 in 1466, and 7,151 in 1542.

43 See Lin Li-yüeh, *Ming tai ti kuo tzuchien sheng*, p. 83, n. 135.

44 These data are derived from Lin Li-yüeh, *Ming tai ti kuo tzuchien sheng*, table 1. Cf. Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*, p. 33.

45 *MS*, 69, pp. 1683–85.

governmental routines going at all levels, under the general supervision of far less specialized civil service officials, who functioned like chief executives. In Ming times, functionaries were numerous and had great influence in government, especially in regional and local units of administration, where officials were few and often ignorant of local customs. Officials came and went, but functionaries were the continuing staff in almost all agencies. One estimate of their total number is 51,000,⁴⁶ but the proportion of functionaries to officials may have been much larger. In the late 1500s, for example, the Ministry of Revenue had an authorized staff of approximately fifty-nine officials and 155 functionaries, and in the Ministry of War the numbers were twenty-one and 149 respectively.⁴⁷ The total of functionaries regularly employed may well have approached or even exceeded 100,000. But they were “not yet in the current” (*wei ju lin*) of regular civil service ranks. They were subjected to periodic merit evaluation by their superiors, and after nine years of honorable service they could be considered for “entering the current” on the basis of their work records. However, the overwhelming majority of them seem to have been career clerks, entrenched in their specialized posts (some hereditarily), and they often served as invaluable aides to appointed officials. Clerical functionaries from Shao-hsing, Chekiang, were especially notable for their expertise and were employed throughout the country in disproportionately large numbers.⁴⁸

Recruitment of officials through examinations separate from the state schools, a tradition dating from Former Han (202 BC–AD 9) practices, reached full maturity in Ming times. After the earliest decades of the dynasty, the examination system produced qualified appointees esteemed more highly by far than any others, and after the 1440s, success in the examination system was the only practical means of starting an official career that might lead to high civil service posts. State schools, including the national universities, were remarkably well coordinated with the examination system; they became, in effect, training centers for participants in the examinations. Even national university students who could qualify for appointments directly found it advantageous to seek more esteemed status as examination graduates, and men who were qualified for office in other ways (by hereditary privilege, for example) had little hope of entering on successful careers without also participating in the examinations.

The Ming recruitment examinations were written and competitive, and it is common for them to be called “open.” They were not open to a minuscule

46 Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century Ming China*, p. 48.

47 TMHT, 7, pp. 139, 143.

48 The most thorough modern study of functionaries in Ming times is Miao Ch'üan-chi, *Ming tai hsü li* (Taipei, 1969). The basic traditional source is TMHT, 8.

proportion of the population who were considered base; the definition of baseness varied regionally but generally included beggars, entertainers, boat people, other vagrants, and bondservants. Earlier restrictions on merchant and artisan families no longer applied. Nevertheless, the examinations were not directly accessible to all comers: one had to qualify. To do this, a man had to complete his studies in a Confucian school or attain a comparable level of scholastic skill under private tutors. In either case, certification of appropriate educational achievement was the responsibility of state school instructors and local magistrates, supplemented after the mid-1400s by provincial education intendants, who gave confirmatory tests to all local nominees on their regular tours of inspection. Since some education intendants could not or did not make complete tours of their province-wide jurisdictions, even in a three-year period, local authorities could submit test papers of their nominees to the intendant's office in the provincial capital. One intendant was reportedly capable of evaluating three hundred such test papers daily.⁴⁹

Local nominees who were confirmed by education intendants were known by the traditional term "budding talents" (*hsiu-ts'ai*). It is noteworthy that this status had to be reconfirmed at three-year intervals and could be voided if a scholar failed to maintain his scholastic level or misbehaved morally. It was not the right of every "budding talent" to participate in the sequence of more formal recruitment examinations. One of the harder tasks of the education intendant was selecting the few most qualified men from the cumulative pool of "budding talents" in every prefecture, as nominees for the first-level of the examinations. These were given every third year in the provincial capitals or, for candidates from the metropolitan areas, in Peking or Nanking. Four thousand or more nominated candidates regularly appeared in the capitals of all but the smallest provinces.

So began the triennial "grand competition" (*ta-pi*).⁵⁰ The gathering of the candidates, the examination sessions, and the celebrating of successful candidates, occupied most of the eighth lunar month every third year, giving provincial capitals a special festive atmosphere. The examination itself (*hsiang-shih*) was supervised by eminent scholar-officials delegated for this purpose by the central government. It stretched over a week in three all-day sessions on the ninth, twelfth, and fifteenth days of the month. The examination sessions took place in a special enclosure where candidates were secluded, each

49 Tilemann Grimm, "Ming education intendants," p. 146.

50 *MS*, 70. Useful descriptions of the examination system are to be found in the writings of Jesuit missionaries who were active in late Ming China. For example, see C. Alvarez Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, pp. 40–47, and Matteo Ricci, *China in the 16th century: The journals of Matteo Ricci, 1583–1610*, trans. L. J. Gallagher (New York, 1953), pp. 34–40.

having a private cubicle in which to write. Soldiers were stationed in the compound to ensure there was no use of reference books and no communication among candidates. After each session, candidates' papers were transcribed and given code numbers by a clerical staff, so that examining officials would not be influenced by either the names or the calligraphy of the writers. In each instance the poorer candidates were culled out and dismissed, until finally, the imperial examiners had to select graduates from only about twice as many candidates as they could pass.

Quotas were established for the number of graduates allowed to pass the examination in each province in 1425 and were occasionally adjusted thereafter. From the 1450s on, the following provincial quotas generally prevailed: candidates from Kweichow shared in the Yunnan quota until 1535, when Kweichow got its own quota of 25 and the Yunnan quota was set at forty (later forty-five).

Provincial graduates (*chü-jen*), always published in rank order, were publicly lionized, were authorized to wear distinctive costumes, won partial tax and labor service exemptions for their families, were eligible for official appointments if they chose to rest on their scholastic laurels, or could pursue more glory in higher-level examinations. Although a provincial graduate could be stripped of his status and privileges by imperial action if he subsequently proved himself unworthy, the status did not have to be reconfirmed at regular intervals.

The next stage of the "grand competition" took place in the dynastic capital in the second lunar month of the year immediately following the provincial examinations. All provincial graduates, including those of earlier cycles who had not yet passed higher examinations and had not already accepted official appointments, were entitled to present themselves for a metropolitan examination (*hui-shih*). So were students who had completed work in the national universities, but who chose to seek still better credentials in the examinations before beginning official careers. Beginning late in the sixteenth century, applicants were given a brief qualifying test to weed out those whose scholastic abilities had seriously deteriorated. The metropolitan examination proper was administered not by the Ministry of Personnel as might be supposed, but by the Ministry of Rites; the arrangement emphasized the symbolic importance attached to the recruitment examination system. The examiners were chosen from among the most distinguished officials of the central government, usually members of the grand secretariat after the first years of the dynasty. On average, there must have been from 1,000 to 2,000 examinees. They were subjected to three day-long sessions patterned similarly to those of the provincial examinations. Those who passed were assembled on the first day of the third lunar month for a palace examination (*tien-shih* or *t'ing-*

shih), a single-question examination presided over by the emperor or his personal delegate. The purpose of this follow-up examination was merely to place the passers of the metropolitan examination in final rank order. All metropolitan graduates (*chin-shih*) were accorded official and public acclaim unmatched in the modern West except possibly in the case of the most publicized sports, entertainment, and war heroes. Special acclaim was reserved for the principal graduate (*chuang-yüan*), the man who headed the list of successful candidates in the palace examination. The rarest achievement of all was to be a triple first (*san-yüan*) – to place first in successive provincial, metropolitan, and palace examinations. Only one man achieved this distinction in Ming times. He was Shang Lu (1414–86), a Chekiang man who became a metropolitan graduate in 1445.⁵¹ He and all others who were placed high on the palace examination were soon appointed to posts in the Hanlin Academy and trained for ultimate service in the grand secretariat. (Shang Lu was to stand at the apex of the civil service hierarchy as senior grand secretary from 1475 to 1477.) All other metropolitan graduates were also virtually assured of prompt appointments, since the examination cycle coincided with triennial evaluations of officials on duty, as a result of which, many were regularly retired or dismissed. Provincial graduates who did not pass the metropolitan examination could still present themselves for official appointments, but they were encouraged instead to undertake advanced studies in one of the national universities in order to prepare to take the metropolitan examination again in the next triennial cycle.

The cycle of recruitment examinations began between 1368 and 1371, producing 120 metropolitan graduates in 1371, but was then abruptly suspended. The founding emperor considered the new metropolitan graduates too bookish and immature for his officialdom. “We sincerely sought worthies,” he complained, “and the empire responded with empty phrasemakers. This is by no means what we intended.”⁵² It was not until 1384–85 that he allowed the recruitment examination cycle to start again. Thereafter, it continued without interruption until the end of the dynasty. In all, the sequence was conducted ninety times, producing a total of 24,874 metropolitan graduates.⁵³ There was no general pass quota at this highest level; graduates fluctuated from a low of thirty-two to a high of 472. In general, a separate quota was established for each metropolitan examination. The average number of successful candidates was 276 per examination. This works out to an average of about ninety new metropolitan graduates per year over the course of the

51 See his biography in *DMB*, pp. 1161–3.

52 Ku Ying-t'ai, *Ming shih chi shih pen mo* (1658), rpt. in 4 vols of *Kuo hsiieh chi pen ts'ung shu chien pien* (Taipei, 1956), ch. 14 (Vol. 2, p. 76).

53 These figures are derived from Chi Huang, *Hsiü Wen hsien t'ung k'ao*, ch. 35.

dynasty, a figure lower than comparable averages for both the earlier Sung dynasty and the later Ch'ing dynasty. If the various provinces regularly filled their quotas for provincial graduates, it would mean that the dynasty produced a cumulative total of provincial graduates exceeding 100,000; that between 80 and 90 percent of them never became metropolitan graduates; and that, in any one year after the mid-1400s, on average, there were on active civil service eligibility lists some 12,000 provincial graduates and some 3,000 metropolitan graduates available to fill the estimated 15,000 to 25,000 posts authorized for the civil service. No statistical data about the ages at which men attained metropolitan graduate status is available, but biographies of Ming officials leave the impression that the normal age range was from the late twenties to the middle thirties. The integration of the school and examination systems is demonstrated in a modern analysis showing that of all metropolitan graduates produced from 1412 to 1574, about 52 percent had at some prior time had status as national university students.⁵⁴

As all previous dynasties, the Ming dynasty inaugurated its recruitment examination system without any provision for balanced geographical representation among metropolitan graduates. Consequently, southerners and southeasterners, representing the wealthiest and most cultured parts of the empire, dominated the early examinations. In 1397 they took all of the metropolitan graduate degrees. The founding emperor was infuriated by this imbalance, sentenced the chief examiners to death, ordered a new examination, and thus added an all-northerner supplementary slate of graduates. This precedent caused subsequent examiners to be more circumspect; and, in 1425, a regional quota system was established. It guaranteed 40 percent of all metropolitan graduate degrees for northerners and left the remaining 60 percent for all others. Soon thereafter a minor adjustment reserved 10 percent of the degrees for men of a "central" region encompassing the relatively underdeveloped regions of Szechwan, Yunnan, Kwangsi, and Kweichow provinces. The quota for northerners was reduced to 35 percent, and 55 percent remained for southerners, including southeasterners. These proportions roughly reflected population distribution and therefore had a certain populist appeal, but they penalized the southeast, which had the strongest scholastic tradition in the empire. Apart from occasional minor tinkering, these regional quotas remained in effect until the end of the Ming. It was not until the Ch'ing dynasty that metropolitan graduate quotas were applied province by province.

The subject matter of the Ming recruitment examinations was the same as that of the schools where students prepared for them – the Four Books, the

54 Lin Li-yüeh, *Ming tai ti kuo tsu chien sheng*, table 7.

Five Classics, and China's history, all as interpreted by the great Sung Neo-Confucian Chu Hsi (1130–1200). In both the provincial and the metropolitan examinations, the first all-day session required candidates to expound upon three passages from the Four Books and four from the Five Classics – passages such as Confucius' comment, "I am not concerned about being without a position but care about how to become established; I am not concerned that no one takes note of me but care about becoming worthy of recognition," or Mencius's dictum that "Remonstrating with the ruler to undertake what is difficult is considered genuine respectfulness." The second session was devoted to drafting seven state documents on set topics or problems in prescribed technical formats. The final session required at least three and preferably five long essays on contemporary government policy issues, with appropriate allusions to classical principles and historical precedents. The palace examination required only one essay on some current policy problem. In all his writings, each candidate was expected to demonstrate his thorough grasp of classical and historical texts and his commitment to the orthodox interpretations of them. Candidates were not tested on any specialized, technical realms of state administration, nor were they called on to display purely literary skills in either prose or poetry.

Beginning in the late 1470s or 1480s, examination candidates (and soon thereafter students in all schools) were expected to write essays in a rhetorical pattern known as the eight-legged style (*pa-ku wen*).⁵⁵ This was essentially a broad formula for analyzing a topic, tracing its implications pro and con, and systematically moving step by step from a beginning to a resolution – a formula not unlike the varied formulas developed by modern teachers of English composition and rhetoric to help students focus and organize their thinking and discipline their expression. The Chinese formula emphasized paired statements (each pair a "leg") with which an argument was developed through a series of contrapuntal stages. There had been some movement toward such a pattern among T'ang and Sung writers. Although eight "legs" or paired statements were a common pattern, the number could vary greatly, depending on the complexity of one's problem or the prescribed length of one's presentation. In time, no doubt because form is always easier to grade than substance, considerations of rhetorical form appear to have been over-emphasized by examiners and, inevitably, in turn by examinees.

It can be argued that civil service recruitment practices in Ming times led to a steady weakening of intellectual curiosity and creativity among the Chinese. First, during the Ming there was an unprecedented narrowing of the ways

⁵⁵ For a general discussion of this form and its development, see Lu Ch'ien, *Pa-ku wen hsiao shih* (Shanghai, 1937).

by which men could work toward good civil service careers, until education and all other intellectual effort overwhelmingly focused on the goal of becoming a metropolitan graduate. Second, the subject matter of higher education and the examinations was narrowly prescribed, so that there was no choice for talented men but to conform to the conservative, moralistic, anti-individualistic views of Chu Hsi on the classics and history.⁵⁶ Third, it has been argued that the development of the “eight-legged style” locked Chinese leaders of the last premodern centuries into an intellectual strait-jacket by imposing such stifling constraints on their expression. In these arguments, the notion that the “eight-legged style” had significant ill effects would seem to be the most easily exaggerated.

In addition to the “regular paths” into the Ming civil service that have now been described, the only access to office was by privilege of inheritance or by purchase. As has already been noted, these paths actually led only indirectly to office in almost all cases. What one could inherit or purchase was student status (in the last Ming decades even lowly status as students in prefectural and other local schools was purchasable); and, although not having to earn such status by scholastic achievement was an undeniable advantage, this was still several steps removed from an official appointment. In these disesteemed ways men could, in effect, get into a “regular path” that might lead to an official appointment. However, such appointees never erased the stigma of having begun their careers in an irregular fashion.

Conditions of service

Having entered service by one of the recruitment paths (*ch'u-shen*) described above, one became an official (*kuan*) with many privileges and exemptions, but did not necessarily or promptly get a duty assignment or appointment (*chih*). Becoming an official brought one under the administrative jurisdiction of the Ministry of Personnel, and one's official career was determined by personnel administration procedures that this ministry primarily supervised.⁵⁷

The backbone of the civil service as an institution was a system of ranks (*p'in*), for each of which there was a prescribed costume, stipend, and prestige title. There were nine basic ranks, numbered from 1 (highest) to 9 (lowest); and the number of possible differentiations was doubled to eighteen by divid-

⁵⁶ One of the more extreme denunciations of the Ming examination system in particular was written by the historian Li Ung Bing. In his *Outlines of Chinese History* (Shanghai, 1914) he wrote, “The followers of the Sung philosophers could endure every form of oppression provided they were assured of their privilege of taking the public examinations,” p. 348; and he described the examination system as “this worst intellectual fetter that man has ever invented,” p. 349. Such views are also found in many more recent writings about Ming China.

⁵⁷ These procedures are discussed in *MS*, 71, and *TMHT*, 5–13.

ing each rank into two degrees (*teng*), upper (*cheng*) and lower (*tsung*). Thus every official's status in the service was indicated in terms of rank 7b (lower 7th rank), 5a (upper 5th rank), and so on. The same rank designations were assigned to all posts that civil service personnel filled, and agencies were commonly considered to have ranks also, identical to the ranks set for their highest posts. In general, ranks 1 through 3 were all high ranks, 4 through 7 were middle ranks, and 8 and 9 were more or less insignificant ranks.

When a man entered service, he was assigned a rank determined by his recruitment path and, in the case of an examination graduate, his standing on the pass list. As the *Official history of the Ming* states, "The relative success or failure of one's whole official career was determined on the day one presented oneself for selection."⁵⁸ It became customary for the top three metropolitan graduates to be appointed compilers (ranks 6b and 7a) in the Hanlin Academy, which pointed them straight toward eventual eminence in the grand secretariat. Other metropolitan graduates also normally entered service in the sixth or seventh ranks, but were less advantageously placed for rapid advancement into high offices. Anyone entering office as a provincial graduate could normally expect an appointment on a prefect's staff in the sixth ranks. If he was particularly fortunate, he might be appointed even as a sub-prefectural (fifth rank) or county magistrate (seventh rank). But such appointments were usually in frontier or remote areas from which an official could not expect to be promoted rapidly. Anyone entering service with only the credentials of a university student could expect no better than a subsidiary post in a prefecture or lesser unit of territorial administration, possibly as high in rank as 6b. This was not a promising post for an ambitious beginner. Or he could present himself for special appointment as an instructor in a local Confucian school, in the ninth rank, a virtually dead-end post from which he could only hope for modest advancement.

Many first-time appointees, especially young metropolitan graduates, were not given regular appointments immediately, but were assigned to capital agencies as observers (*kuan-cheng*). These seem to have been less specific assignments than probationary appointments, for it was understood that observers were trainees, and at intervals they were returned to the Ministry of Personnel, reportedly ripe to participate anew in the appointment selection process (known by the general term *ch'üan-hsüan*). A special group of metropolitan graduates, normally those ranking just after the top three, were assigned as observers in the Hanlin Academy with the special designation Hanlin bachelors (*shu-chi-shih*). These were men who had presented special evidence of literary talent, and their assignments were opportunities for advanced literary

⁵⁸ *MS*, 69, p. 1679.

training under Hanlin tutors. After three years, the best of each group were given regular appointments in the Hanlin Academy, and others were distributed among various central governmental agencies. Their prospects for a rapid advancement were normally good in either case, and the best of them could hope to rise through the Hanlin Academy into the grand secretariat.

It was common for first appointments to be probationary or acting appointments for up to a year. Then, if an appointee was evaluated favorably by his superiors, his status changed into a substantive appointment. An appointee given a substantive appointment had a kind of continuing tenure for a three-year term, which, in the normal course of events, was renewed for two more such terms for a full tenure of nine years. After nine years, the appointment lapsed, and the official reported back to the Ministry of Personnel for reappointment. Meantime, a substantial dossier or service record had been developing, which would determine the official's future, for every official on duty was subjected to several kinds of evaluations.

The principal evaluations were merit ratings (*k'ao*) geared to the individual official's career timetable. Three years after appointment, he was rated by the head of his agency as being superior, average, or inferior. These merit ratings, whether for central governmental or for provincial personnel, were routed through the Censorate for appropriate emendations based on annual reports from the regional inspectors it assigned to every province. The ratings were then passed on to the Ministry of Personnel for action. A superior merit rating entitled one to be considered for a promotion, an average rating assured one a second term in his post, but an inferior rating could result in a demotion. In most cases, apparently, the ratings were merely noted in one's service record until three ratings over nine years had accumulated. Then the formula applied was as follows: at least two superior ratings combined with one rating no worse than average earned a promotion; two average ratings combined with one inferior rating, or any worse combination of ratings, required a demotion; and combinations of ratings between these levels called for a new appointment without a change in rank.

An official's fate was not entirely determined by these triennial merit ratings, however. Other kinds of evaluations intruded. The major one was called the great reckoning (*ta-chi*). This consisted of an evaluation of all officials serving away from the capital that was known as an outer evaluation (*wai-ch'a*), and an evaluation for all in the central government known as a capital evaluation (*ching-ch'a*). The outer evaluation was carried out on a three-year cycle wholly unrelated to the three-year cycle of merit ratings applicable to any one appointee. In the case of the outer evaluation, the heads of all local agencies sent monthly reports on all their subordinates to their prefects, and at the end of each year each prefect submitted to his provincial superiors a con-

solidated report on all officials in his jurisdiction. These evaluations focused on instances of malfeasance or shortcomings in eight specified categories: avarice, cruelty, frivolity or instability, inadequacy, senility, ill health, weariness, and inattentiveness. On the basis of these reports and any other information at hand, all provincial authorities, every third year, prepared a consolidated report on all officials in their respective jurisdictions for consideration at the capital by the Ministry of Personnel and the Censorate in collaboration. This report also took into account self-evaluations submitted in advance by all those provincial officials who were scheduled to gather at the capital for a great triennial court audience.

The *Official history of the Ming* reports that, in 1385, a total of 4,117 provincial officials came to such an audience, of whom, 10 percent were judged superior and 10 percent inferior, and further, that 10 percent (probably the inferior group only) were guilty of criminal malfeasance or incompetence. It was ordered that those rated superior be promoted, those rated inferior be demoted, those guilty of malfeasance be sent to trial, those guilty of incompetence be dismissed from service, and all others be sent back to their posts.⁵⁹ More than two centuries later, the famous Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, who resided in Peking from 1601 to 1610, reported on the "outer evaluation" of 1607 with some awe:

Every third year the ranking officials of all provinces, districts, and cities . . . must convene in Peking [sic] to express their solemn fealty to the King. At that time a rigorous investigation is made concerning the magistrates of every province in the entire kingdom, including those present and those not called. The purpose of this inspection is to determine who shall be retained in public office, how many are to be removed, and the number to be promoted or demoted and punished, if need be. There is no respect for persons in this searching inquisition. I myself have observed that not even the King would dare to change a decision settled upon by the judges of this public investigation. Those who are punished are by no means few or of lower grade. After the general inquiry took place in 1607, we read that sentence was passed upon four thousand of the magistrates, and I say read because a list of the names of those concerned is published in a single volume and circulated throughout the land.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *MS*, 71, pp. 1722–23.

⁶⁰ Matteo Ricci, *China in the 16th Century*, pp. 56–57. *MSL*, *Shen-tsung shih lu*, 429, pp. 9b–10b, for the 1607 evaluation, records the names only of provincial-level officials and of prefects who were evaluated negatively. Of the fifty named, nine were found inattentive, twelve frivolous, and twenty-nine inadequate. Of the frivolous, three were demoted three degrees; of the inadequate, four were demoted two degrees. Six additional names are given of men in the same categories of posts who were dismissed: three for weakness or leniency, one for abandoning his post, and two for avarice. Fifty-six unnamed men serving in subordinate prefectural posts or in subprefectures or districts are reported to have been judged avaricious and were presumably dismissed. Thus, a total of 112 men seem to have been evaluated negatively, of whom only sixty-nine seem to have been demoted or otherwise punished. The 4,000 referred to by Ricci no doubt approximates the total number of officials who were evaluated, not the number upon whom "sentence was passed" negatively.

Initially, the capital evaluation occurred irregularly. It then was held at five, to nine- or ten-year intervals. From the time of the Hung-chih emperor (r. 1487–1505), it was carried out on a six-year cycle. The categories used for evaluation were similar to those used in the outer evaluation. Central government officials of the fifth and lower ranks were evaluated by their superiors, whose reports were sent to the Ministry of Personnel and the Censorate for consideration and action. Officials of the fourth and higher ranks submitted evaluations of themselves directly to the emperor. These evaluations were subjected to careful scrutiny by censorial officials before being acted on, but the emperor alone could take action on the self-evaluations of such eminent executive officials.

In addition to these regular merit ratings and evaluations, all officials were additionally subject to unscheduled evaluations by members of the Censorate and comparable provincial-level agencies, who, as regional inspectors in the provinces, or when on periodic audits, or when on inspection visits to all agencies of the central government, made their independent personnel evaluations. These evaluations found their way into the service dossiers on which the regular ratings and evaluations were based. Censors were expected to make aggressive inquiries and to welcome complaints from anyone who had a grievance, especially about the conduct of an official in local administration. In cases of flagrant misconduct, censors were authorized to submit impeachments of the offenders, whatever their rank, directly to the emperor, and officials so impeached often found themselves abruptly dismissed, demoted, fined, rebuked, or at least subjected to a formal investigation of the charges brought against them. By the late 1500s, if not earlier, central government officials who were impeached by censors routinely withdrew from active service in their posts pending the ultimate disposition of their cases by the emperor. At the opposite extreme, officials at all levels might find themselves unexpectedly promoted or otherwise rewarded on the basis of special censorial commendations.

Beginning in 1384, in recognition of the power wielded by the Ministry of Personnel through the complex system of merit ratings and evaluations, heads of agencies were permitted to call attention, at any time, to deserving subordinates who had been overlooked by the ministry. These recommendations were known as guaranteed recommendations (*pao-chü*).⁶¹ They were commonly used on behalf of officials in the lowly eighth and ninth ranks, or subofficial functionaries, and were generally similar to the recommendations relied on during the early decades of the dynasty for bringing new recruits into service. Such recommendations were guaranteed in that, if someone

61 *MS*, 71, pp. 1719–21.

was promoted on the basis of a special recommendation and subsequently misbehaved, his recommender was considered equally responsible and could be punished. Officials proved naturally wary of exposing themselves to such risks; so emperors fell into the habit of requiring certain categories of officials to submit recommendations. Thus, in 1402, after the Yung-lo emperor had usurped the throne, he ordered all capital officials of the seventh and higher grades and all provincial officials down to district magistrates to recommend one man each. After several decades, a routine procedure developed: whenever there were vacancies in provincial-level posts or among prefects, every capital official of ranks 1 through 3 had to recommend a man of official status who was not in a post from which he might ordinarily be promoted to fill such a vacancy. Usually, recommendees were to come from specified categories of lower-ranked central government officials. Recommendations came to be relied on so extensively that, without guarantors, officials had little hope of being promoted. However, the recommendation system was also abused, both by clique-building patrons and by sycophantic clients. The recommendation system consequently fell into disfavor beginning in 1530, and gradually lost its place in personnel administration.

Whenever any official came to the end of his designated term, or if he was marked for a change of status earlier as a result of ratings, evaluations, and recommendations, he was reconsidered by the Ministry of Personnel in a so-called grand selection (*ta-hsüan*). Grand selections were conducted in all even-numbered months through the year. Odd-numbered months were reserved for special selections (*chi-hsüan*), in which the ministry dealt with such matters as granting leaves of absence, restoring men to duty after leaves, transfers required to avoid having relatives serving in the same agency, and so on. Investigations of one's demeanor, speech, decision-making capabilities, and calligraphy (which were part of the T'ang system of evaluation) were not called for, except after 1468, and then, only when new officials without examination degrees were first appointed to office. In assigning experienced men to new posts, the ministry relied almost entirely on the accumulated ratings and evaluations in its dossiers.

As a general rule, an official could not be promoted more than two degrees in rank at a time; a bigger jump in rank was labeled extraordinary (*ch'ao*). On the other hand, an official generally could not be demoted by routine ministry action more than three degrees (*teng*) in rank.⁶²

62 Officials could, of course, be demoted more severely, or dismissed from the service as a result of appropriate judicial proceedings. In addition, in practice, officials were often promoted more than two degrees without such promotions being labeled extraordinary. It was not uncommon, for example, for various censorial officials in posts presumably carrying rank 7a or 7b to be promoted into

Footnote continued on next page

When an official rose to high office in the fourth and higher ranks (normally after decades of service), his career was no longer so fully dependent on the Ministry of Personnel, and his tenure in a post became indefinite. He served more nearly at the pleasure of the emperor, in terms both of the posts he held and of his tenure in any of them. But appointments in the higher ranks were not made entirely at the emperor's pleasure. In keeping with the centuries-old tradition that, in all things, emperors disposed only when ministers proposed, the emperor was generally bound to consider for appointment only men nominated by the officialdom. There were several kinds of nominating groups. When a grand secretary or a minister of personnel was to be appointed, there was an audience nomination (*t'ing-t'ui*) produced by a gathering, apparently, of all officials entitled to participate in regular court audiences. For other specified appointments (including, for example, senior provincial-level posts) all capital officials of the third and higher ranks were convened. The result of such an assembly was the submission to the emperor of one name for approval, or of two names from which to choose. Emperors could reject nominations, whereupon the designated body of consultants submitted a second nomination for consideration. Thus, the civil service, through such groups, regularly offered its choices from among which the emperor could make his selection. Emperors always had ways of communicating their wishes in such matters to the nominating bodies. Moreover, on occasion a capricious emperor could appoint someone to high office by special edict (*t'e-chih*), without waiting for prescribed nominations, though the officialdom normally protested such imperial arrogance vociferously. In any event, no Ming emperor after the founding reign plucked men from obscurity to serve in high office.

The widest-ranging statistical study available covers the careers of 23,300 Ming civil office-holders from every period of the dynasty and at every level of government. On average, each official occupied 1.3 posts in his career; the vast majority obviously had only a single appointment. Even central government officials occupied an average of only two posts during their careers, although officials who reached the highest ranks commonly rose through a cumulative total of ten posts. The average length of tenure at all levels tended

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posts presumably carrying such ranks as 4a without any indication that the promotions were extraordinary. It might be concluded that the rank usually prescribed for a position was the normal base rank for an appointee and that while in any one post he might be promoted in rank routinely. The contrary is clearly indicated in the sources, however; one's post corresponded to his rank, and his salary was determined by his rank. While serving in any one post, he was rewarded only with increases in prestige titles. My inclination is to believe that we simply do not yet understand the finer points of Ming personnel administration. See Charles O. Hucker, *The censorial system of Ming China* (Stanford, 1966), p. 340, n. 96.

to decline somewhat through the course of the dynasty. In all central government posts average tenure was 2.7 years; in provincial-level posts it was 2.6 years; and in regional and local posts down to the level of district magistrates it was approximately five years.⁶³ A more narrowly focused study of all the men listed in the *Official history of the Ming* as grand secretaries or ministers (*shang-shu*, rank 2a) in one of the six ministries, who were the men who comprised the core of general administration in the central government, shows that the average tenure in one post was thirty-one months. Even in these highly visible, highly vulnerable posts, however, tenure longer than six years actually accounted for almost half the total. Thus, it has been suggested that, "the length of tenure enjoyed by the high officials of the Ming was . . . ample enough to provide continuity and administrative expertise in the central government."⁶⁴ A still narrower analysis of censorial officials during the decade 1424–34 reveals that full nine-year tenure in these offices (though they also were highly visible and vulnerable) was far from uncommon.⁶⁵

The rules of personnel administration in Ming times did not promote professionalism by ensuring the continuity of careers in any special types of agencies. Major exceptions were the corps of imperial physicians and astrologers, whose positions were mostly hereditary. They, however, were only nominal members of the civil service. Aside from these positions, it was virtually unknown for anyone to have an unbroken career in any one type of service by which he might accumulate highly specialized expertise. In the case of the minister of revenue, for example, thirty-seven of the fifty-nine men who occupied the post in Ming times had been vice-ministers of revenue, but thirty-eight of the fifty-nine had, at some time, been vice-ministers in other ministries.⁶⁶ The most striking evidence of a nonprofessional emphasis in the service is the fact that men were groomed for the most powerful executive posts in the grand secretariat through service as editors and compilers in the Hanlin Academy and virtually never had any experience in line administrative agencies.

Officials as a class, including those not on active duty, enjoyed a variety of privileges and exemptions. In general, officials and their immediate families did not have to pay taxes and were not called on to perform labor service for the state. The types and colors of clothing that officials wore varied according to rank and were forbidden to nonofficials. Officials were exempt from

63 James B. Parsons, "The Ming dynasty bureaucracy: Aspects of background forces," in Charles O. Hucker, ed., *Chinese government in Ming times: Seven studies*, pp. 175–231; esp. p. 178, table 1.

64 O. B. Van der Sprenkel, "High officials of the Ming," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London University, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1953), pp. 289–326; esp. p. 98, table 1 and pp. 112–13.

65 C. O. Hucker, *The censorial system of Ming China* (Stanford, 1966), p. 338, n. 92.

66 O. B. Van der Sprenkel, "High officials of the Ming," p. 103, table 13.

general restrictions on the sizes and decor of their houses, and, depending on rank, they were permitted to ride on horseback or even in sedan-chairs, which commoners were not allowed to do.⁶⁷ If officials of ranks 1 through 3 committed any legal offenses they were virtually immune even from investigation; no action could be taken against them without specific orders from the emperor. No trial of any capital official, or provincial officials of the fifth or higher rank, could be undertaken without express permission of the emperor, and in the case of lesser officials no sentence could be carried out without imperial approval.⁶⁸ Unquestionably, many high officials suffered only mild rebukes for offenses that would have brought severe punishment to commoners.

Among the benefits enjoyed by officials were prestige titles (*san kuan*) and merit titles (*hsin*). After receiving his first satisfactory merit rating (*k'ao*), every official was entitled to an archaic-sounding prestige title suited to his regular rank (*p'in*), and he could request that the prestige title he enjoyed be conferred also on his father and grandfather. There were forty-two such titles, enough so that an official in any one rank could be awarded a prestige promotion without a change of actual rank or duty assignment. The Ming prestige titles for civil officials corresponding to regular ranks as indicated are given in Table 1.2.

Merit titles (*hsin*) were granted, at least in theory, for special achievement and were awarded only to officials of the 5th and higher ranks. These titles were keyed to their regular ranks in a manner similar to the prestige titles. They appear in Table 1.3. Because of these conventions of providing prestige and merit titles, a high official might be known officially by the cumbersome designation "Supreme Chief Minister for Administration, Grand Master for Assisting Toward Goodness, Minister of Personnel." This title did not even count posts he might hold concurrently (*chien*), or any specialized duty assignments he might bear – for example, being temporarily in charge of a ministry other than Personnel, when, for some reason, the ministership was vacant.

Officials on active duty received salaries from the state, according to their rank status (*p'in*). Nominally, salaries were reckoned in bushels (*tan*) of rice (see Table 1.4). The pay scale for instructors in Confucian schools was different, ranging only from 2 *tan*, to two *tan* and 5 *tan* of rice per month. This placed instructors well below the ordinary official of rank 9b and in the

67 The ways in which officials benefited from these and other sumptuary laws and regulations during the Ming, as well as during other eras, are discussed in Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *Law and society in traditional China* (Paris, 1961), esp. chs. 3 and 4 on "Social classes."

68 TMHT, 160. Cf. Ch'ü, *Law and society in traditional China*, pp. 177–85.

TABLE I. 2
Prestige titles of Ming civil officials

Civil service rank	Title
1a	(1: highest level) Specially Promoted Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (<i>t'ê chin kuang lu ta fu</i>) (2: lowest level) Specially Promoted Grand Master for Glorious Happiness (<i>t'ê chin jung lu ta fu</i>)
1b	(1) Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (<i>kuang lu ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master for Glorious Happiness (<i>jung lu ta fu</i>)
2a	(1) Grand Master for Assisting Toward Virtue (<i>tzu te ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master for Assisting Toward Good Governance (<i>tzu cheng ta fu</i>) (3) Grand Master for Assisting Toward Goodness (<i>tzu shan ta fu</i>)
2b	(1) Grand Master for Proper Service (<i>cheng feng ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master for Thorough Service (<i>t'ung feng ta fu</i>) (3) Grand Master for Palace Attendance (<i>chung feng ta fu</i>)
3a	(1) Grand Master for Proper Consultation (<i>cheng i ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master for Thorough Counsel (<i>t'ung i ta fu</i>) (3) Grand Master for Excellent Counsel (<i>chia i ta fu</i>)
3b	(1) Superior Grand Master of the Palace (<i>t'ai chung ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master of the Palace (<i>chung ta fu</i>) (3) Lesser Grand Master of the Palace (<i>ya chung ta fu</i>)
4a	(1) Grand Master for Palace Counsel (<i>chung i ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master Exemplar (<i>chung hsien ta fu</i>) (3) Grand Master for Palace Accord (<i>chung shun ta fu</i>)
4b	(1) Grand Master for Court Audiences (<i>ch'ao ching ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master for Court Discussion (<i>ch'ao i ta fu</i>) (3) Grand Master for Court Precedence (<i>ch'ao lieh ta fu</i>)
5a	(1) Grand Master for Governance (<i>feng cheng ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master for Consultation (<i>feng i ta fu</i>)
5b	(1) Grand Master for Fostering Uprightness (<i>feng chih ta fu</i>) (2) Grand Master for Admonishment (<i>feng hsün ta fu</i>)
6a	(1) Gentleman for Fostering Virtue (<i>ch'eng te lang</i>) (2) Gentleman for Fostering Uprightness (<i>ch'eng chih lang</i>)
6b	(1) Gentleman-Confucian (<i>ju lin lang</i>) (2) Gentleman for Rendering Service (<i>ch'eng wu lang</i>)
7a	(1) Gentleman-litterateur (<i>wen lin lang</i>) (2) Gentleman for Managing Affairs (<i>ch'eng shih lang</i>)
7b	(1) Gentleman for Summoning (<i>cheng shih lang</i>) (2) Gentleman for Attendance (<i>ts'ung shih lang</i>)
8a	(1) Gentleman for Good Service (<i>hsiu chih lang</i>) (2) Gentleman for Meritorious Achievement (<i>ti kung lang</i>)
8b	(1) Secondary Gentleman for Good Service (<i>hsiu chih tso lang</i>) (2) Secondary Gentleman for Meritorious Achievement (<i>ti kung tso lang</i>)
9a	(1) Court Gentleman for Promoted Service (<i>teng shih lang</i>) (2) Court Gentleman for Ceremonial Service (<i>chiang shih lang</i>)
9b	(1) Secondary Gentleman for Promoted Service (<i>teng shih tso lang</i>) (2) Secondary Gentleman for Ceremonial Service (<i>chiang shih tso lang</i>) ⁶⁹

69 *TMHT*, 6, pp. 133-35.

TABLE 1.3
Ming titles of merit

Civil service rank	Title
1a	Left or Right Pillar of State (<i>tsu, yu chu kuo</i>)
1b	Pillar of State (<i>chu kuo</i>)
2a	Supreme Chief Minister for Administration (<i>cheng chih shang ch'ing</i>)
2b	Chief Minister for Administration (<i>cheng chih ch'ing</i>)
3a	Governor Assisting in Administration (<i>tsu chih yin</i>)
3b	Vice Governor Assisting in Administration (<i>tsu chih shao yin</i>)
4a	Governor Participating in Administration (<i>tsan chih yin</i>)
4b	Vice Governor Participating in Administration (<i>tsan chih shao yin</i>)
5a	Governor Cultivator of Rectitude (<i>hsiu cheng shu yin</i>)
5b	Governor Companion in Rectitude (<i>hsieh cheng shu yin</i>) ⁷⁰

TABLE 1.4
Salary scale of Ming civil officials

Civil service rank	Salary in <i>tan</i>	Civil service rank	Salary in <i>tan</i>
1a	*1,044	1b	888
2a	732	2b	576
3a	420	3b	312
4a	288	4b	252
5a	192	5b	168
6a	120	6b	96
7a	90	7b	84
8a	78	8b	72
9a	66	9b	60

*bushels per year

same general range as subofficial functionaries, who were paid from 2 *tan* and 5 *tau*, down to 6 *tau* per month.⁷¹

Although these pay scales do not compare unfavorably with those of prior dynasties, and even though salaries were modestly supplemented with allowances for servants, fuel, and travel, Ming officials did not fare well in terms of real income. The trouble was that, although the dynasty began by paying officials in rice, before the end of the first reign, payments were being made only partly in rice, with the proportion of rice in officials' salaries seeming to have declined steadily thereafter. The remainder of the officials' salaries was paid in such other commodities as paper money (the real value of which declined to virtually nothing), silk, cotton, and finally silver. Moreover, salary rice was converted into these other forms of payment at rates which were

⁷⁰ *TMHT*, 10, p. 255.

⁷¹ *MS*, 72, p. 1741. For the conversion of *tan* and *tau* to western measures, see the Table of Weights and Measures on p. xxiii.

not fair market rates, but artificial, very low rates. Officials consistently complained that they could not live on their salaries, and the *Official history of the Ming* exclaims: "From antiquity, official salaries have never been as meager as this!"⁷² It has been estimated that, from as early as 1434, official salaries were, in fact, reduced to 4 percent of their nominal values and that capital officials, in particular, went virtually unpaid.⁷³ Many officials seem to have met their essential needs by accepting fees from state-assigned servants and releasing them from service.

Low monetary rewards were only one aspect of the poor treatment that Ming officials received. Whatever their legal privileges and exemptions may have been, they were by no means immune from harsh treatment. The Hung-wu emperor set the tone for the dynasty, in this regard, in a series of terrible purges of the officialdom, for which he has been labeled "the cruelest and most vicious tyrant of all Chinese history."⁷⁴ Tens of thousands of people, including members of the nobility and high officials, reportedly died in his purges, and as many more suffered less grievously.⁷⁵ Other notorious purges of the officialdom occurred in the 1520s and the 1620s.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the sufferings of officials on emperors' orders were not limited to these dramatic episodes. Of 725 men listed in the highest posts in civil administration during the dynasty – as grand secretaries, ministers in the six ministries, and censors-in-chief in the Censorate – 220, or 30 percent, ended their careers in humiliation and disaster. Fourteen were fortunate enough merely to be demoted, and 133 were dismissed from office. The worst sufferers included thirty-eight who were banished to serve as common soldiers in frontier garrisons, forty-nine who were imprisoned, and twenty who were put to death.⁷⁷ Lesser officials probably suffered less severely. However, during the decade from 1424 to 1434, more than 261 civil officials were denounced in censorial impeachments and, in the period 1620–27, more than 691 officials were similarly denounced.⁷⁸ It was common for officials to have their meager salaries suspended for up to a year, and more severe punishments were not uncommon.

72 *MS*, 82, p. 2003.

73 Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century China*, pp. 48–49.

74 F. W. Mote, *The poet Kao Ch'i* (Princeton, 1962), p. 36. See also Mote's article, "The growth of Chinese despotism," *Oriens extremus*, 8 (1961), pp. 1–41; and Charles O. Hucker, *The Ming dynasty: its origins and evolving institutions* (Ann Arbor, 1978), pp. 66–73. The most thorough study of the Hung-wu emperor's purges is Thomas P. Massey, "Chu Yüan-chang and the Hu-lan cases of the early Ming dynasty" (Diss. University of Michigan, 1983).

75 On these purges, see Mote and Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, pp. 149–64.

76 On these purges, see Mote and Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, pp. 455–7; 607–10.

77 These are my tabulations from *MS*, 109–12. There are some duplications, such as men who were dismissed from service or put to death after having been imprisoned. Cf. O. B. Van der Sprenkel, "High officials of the Ming," p. 98, table 8.

78 C. O. Hucker, *The censorial system of Ming China*, p. 306, table 2, and p. 309, table 8.

The Ming emperors were most notorious for subjecting their officials to vicious floggings on the bared buttocks. These floggings were administered by eunuchs and guardsmen in open court – a humiliation alien to the traditional ruler-minister relationship among the Chinese, and one by which ministers were often so physically abused that they required months to recuperate. Under the Hung-wu emperor, dignitaries as eminent as a marquis and as a minister of the second rank died from such floggings. In 1519, after a turbulent protest about the Cheng-te emperor's capriciousness, 146 capital officials were reportedly flogged in court, and eleven died as a result. In consequence of a controversy under the Chia-ching emperor, in 1524 it is recorded that 134 capital officials suffered both imprisonment and flogging at court, with the result that sixteen died.⁷⁹ It is not difficult to conclude that the Ming emperors, through their agents among palace eunuchs and in the Imperial Bodyguard, maintained a reign of terror over the civil service.⁸⁰ The other side of this coin is that the Ming officialdom repeatedly brought disaster upon itself by indulging in factional feuding and that many officials were punished because, undaunted by the autocratic ways of their emperors, they challenged them time and again with provocative remonstrances. The Ming era produced a large number of civil service idealists who stood up against their bullying rulers. Probably the most renowned of these was Hai Jui (1513–87), a stern moralist and disciplinarian, who was imprisoned for criticizing the Chia-ching emperor's eccentricities and inattentiveness.⁸¹ It can hardly be suggested that such officials righted imbalances in the ruler-minister relationship of Ming times, but it cannot be thought that the Ming civil service was a supine, unprotesting victim of, or a masochistic collaborator in, rampant despotism on the part of emperors.

In the routine of Ming personnel administration, traditional rules about avoidance (*hui pi*) applied: if two relatives happened to be appointed to one agency, the junior had to withdraw and request a transfer; and, with the exception of school instructors, no official was ever allowed to serve in the local administration of his home province. Also, officials were expected to take three-year leaves of absence to mourn the death of a parent, normally without pay, but sometimes on half pay by special imperial grace. They were expected to respond if the emperor called them back to

79 Ch'ien Mu, *Kuo shih ta kang* (Taipei, 1952), p. 477; *Ming T'ungchien*, 51, pp. 1914–18. See *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 448–49, where the discussion, based on different sources, gives slightly different figures.

80 The most detailed and singlemindedly sensational account of all the abuses attributable to the Ming emperors, their eunuchs, and the Imperial Bodyguard is Ting I, *Ming tai t'e wu cheng chih*.

81 See the biography of Hai Jui in *DMB*, pp. 474–9. A controversy about how to evaluate Hai Jui's historical place sparked the Great Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic almost four centuries later, in the mid-1960s.

duty during such a leave period, as often happened in the cases of favored, high officials of the central government. Officials could take sick leave with permission of the Ministry of Personnel or the emperor, with pay, for as long as three months. Seventy was the normal retirement age, and if a retired official was in danger of impoverishment he could apparently expect a pension of four bushels of rice a year and the service of household servants assigned by the local magistrate. One could retire because of physical disability after the age of fifty-five with similar expectations. In these regards, as in the case of the salaries of officials on active duty, the Ming dynasty seems to have been less generous to its civil servants than was customary under earlier native dynasties.

At death, an official with a reputable record of service was granted a flattering posthumous epithet by the Ministry of Rites, such as the epithet Loyal and Incorruptible (*Chung-chieh*) conferred on Hai Jui. Deceased officials were commonly referred to by such posthumous epithets with the suffix *kung*, literally Duke; but this was no more than a mark of courtesy equivalent to His honor and is not to be confused with the title of nobility.

The military service

The military establishment comprised, by far, the largest single component of Ming governmental personnel. In 1392, there were reportedly 16,489 military officers and 1,198,442 soldiers on regular, permanent duty. The numbers fluctuated greatly through the rest of the dynasty, until, in the last decades of the dynasty, it is reported that there were 100,000 officers and 4 million soldiers on the service rolls. As will be seen, such figures (especially those from the late Ming) cannot be considered accurate representations of Ming fighting strength.⁸² Nevertheless, the Ming military establishment was always enormous and was maintained only at a great cost to society. Moreover, although its officers as a corps were not as highly esteemed and influential as civil officials were, individual military men consistently played prominent roles in the highest councils of government.

Two characteristics of the Ming military system are specially notable. First, as will be demonstrated below, after the earliest decades of the

82 Standard sources on the Ming military system are *MS*, ch. 89–92, and *TMHT*, ch. 118–58. Useful modern studies are Ch'en Wen-shih, "Ming tai wei so ti chün," *BIHP*, Vol. 48, no. 2 (June, 1977), pp. 177–203; Hsieh Yü-ts'ai, "Ming tai wei so chih tu hsing shuai k'ao," *Shuo wen yüeh k'an* (1941), Vol. 2, rpt. in Pao Tsun-p'eng, ed., *Ming shih lun ts'ung* (Taipei, 1968), Vol. 4, pp. 155–247; Wu Han, "Ming-tai ti chün-ping," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi shih chi-k'an*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1937), rpt. in Wu Han, *Tu shih chu chi* (Peking, 1961), pp. 92–141; and Wang Yü-ch'üan, *Ming tai ti chün t'un* (Peking, 1965). Unfortunately, there is not yet a thorough study of Ming military matters in a Western language.

dynasty the military came under the almost complete dominance and control of the civil service: throughout the dynasty the routine administrative management of the military was directed by the civil service Ministry of War (*ping-pu*), and, from the 1400s, civil officials took over supervisory control of its tactical operations as well. Second, in marked contrast to the principles on which the civil service was built, the military service was rooted primarily in hereditary service, in the cases both of officers and of soldiers alike.

The basic military unit in the Ming system was a guard (*wei*), subdivided into battalions (*ch'ien-hu so*) that in turn were subdivided into companies (*po-hu so*). Over the array of guards was set a hierarchy of supervisory officers at the provincial level and in the central government. The most distinguished of these supervisory officers were members of the nobility. Separate from this administrative hierarchy, there was a structure of tactical commands to which officers and soldiers of the guards were detached on temporary duty for training, active defense service, or active campaigning. The tactical hierarchy will be discussed in a subsequent section. Attention here will focus on personnel aspects of the administrative structure.

The officer corps

Like their civil service counterparts, military officers were graded in ranks (*p'in*), each subdivided into two degrees (*teng*). The military ranks, however, extended from 1a at the top, only down to 6b, providing a total of twelve degrees of differentiation in rank rather than the civil service's eighteen. The highest ranked post in the guards was only at level 3a: the rank of a guard commander (*chih-hui shih*). All guard-level posts were inheritable and were thus collectively called hereditary offices (*shih-kuan*). Executive posts in the provincial-level and central government supervisory hierarchy were not inheritable and were called circulating offices (*liu-kuan*); these posts were filled by appointees derived from the guard-level hereditary offices. Thus, an individual officer with hereditary rank of 4a as an assistant guard commander (*chih-hui ch'ien-shih*) might, on the basis of merit, be promoted to rank 3a as assistant commissioner of a provincial-level Regional Military Commission (*tu chih-hui ch'ien-shih*), but, when he died or retired, his heir would succeed, not to his provincial-level rank 3a post, but to his original rank 4a guard post.

What was inheritable was not eligibility to be considered for an appointment at a particular rank, which, in the case of the civil service, was a minor, hereditary path of entry to the service. What was inheritable was a particular, specified post in a particular, specified guard, which was the military officer's equivalent to anyone else's native place. The nature of the system is illustrated in the career of one of the most famous Ming generals, Ch'i Chi-kuang

(1528–88).⁸³ Ch'i's sixth generation ancestor, who died in the 1380s in the military service of the founding emperor, had earned for his son the right to inherit the post of assistant commander, rank 4a, in the Teng-chou Guard on the northern coast of Shantung province. After a century and a half of hereditary successions, Ch'i Chi-kuang at the age of sixteen inherited that post on his father's death in 1544. He won a series of promotions and in 1574 attained the highest possible rank, 1a, as commissioner-in-chief (*tu-tu*) in a Chief Military Commission (*tu-tu fu*) at the capital. Because of a minor failure in field action he was deprived of his hereditary privilege in 1559, but later successes enabled him to regain the privilege at a lesser rank in 1571, so that his heir could claim a post as a battalion commander (*ch'ien-hu*), rank 5a, in the Teng-chou Guard; and later, as an added mark of imperial favor, Ch'i was granted the privilege of having another son inherit a post of company commander (*po-hu*), rank 6a, in the prestigious Imperial Bodyguard (*chin-i wei*). These posts his sons apparently did, in fact, assume when Ch'i retired in 1585. It did not matter that Ch'i himself had served only four or five years in the Teng-chou Guard and had never served in the Imperial Bodyguard; and, it mattered even less that he had served, in the tactical command hierarchy, as senior military commander in Chekiang and Fukien provinces from 1561 to 1567 and as senior commander of the Chi-chou defense area, northeast of Peking, from 1569 to 1583. His roots were in the Teng-chou Guard, his pay throughout his career was largely chargeable to the Teng-chou Guard, and his ordinary inheritance privilege applied to the Teng-chou Guard.

The inheritance system dated from the dynasty's founding era, and a large proportion of all later Ming officers, as in Ch'i Chi-kuang's case, held their posts in consequence of the achievements of their forebears of that period in assisting the Hung-wu emperor to win and consolidate the empire, or in consequence of their forebears having served under the Yung-lo emperor in his usurpation of the throne in 1401 and in his subsequent campaigns. It was the responsibility of the Ministry of War to see that the inheritance system worked smoothly and was not abused, and the ministry apparently did so with care. The eldest son of the principal wife was the proper heir. If an officer died or retired without such an heir, the eldest son by a secondary wife, or a younger brother of the officer, could submit a claim to succeed by substitution (*t'i*) and was normally accepted for service. If the heir was not yet ten years old at his father's death, such a substitute was acceptable only on a temporary basis and had to yield this post to the heir when the heir reached the age of twenty. In any case, the successor's claim had to be guaranteed (*pao*) by authorities of the appropriate guard, and the successor had to pass a fitness test

83 See his biography in *DMB*, pp. 220–24. Cf. *MS* 212, pp. 5610–17.

before actually taking up his duties. The test emphasized horsemanship and archery, both mounted and dismounted. The rules changed from time to time, but normally a successor who failed the fitness test was allowed to serve on a probationary basis for a year; if he then was still unable to pass the test, the successor next-in-line according to Ministry of War regulations was given an opportunity to establish himself.⁸⁴

Direct inheritance by an heir or a qualified substitute was not the only path of entry to a career as a military officer. One could, at any time, be granted officer status for extraordinary merit in battle. The pool from which such supplementary officers principally came consisted of so-called housemen or retainers (*she-jen*), who were kinsmen and companions of officers, and who had a status probably similar to that of the squires who attended medieval European knights. An officer's housemen could include his younger brothers, sons, cousins, and, apparently, even unrelated hangers-on. It was expected that each officer would have an entourage of three or more housemen, and sometimes the number was much larger. Housemen were recognized by the government as having quasi-official status without rank, had state-paid salaries, lived in garrisons with their patron officers, and participated in battle. For merit, housemen could be recommended for appointments as officers. Ordinary soldiers, similarly, could be recommended for appointments as officers for extraordinary merit in battle.

Another path of entry into the officer corps was success in examinations that paralleled the far more influential civil service recruitment examinations. Although provided for, in principle, at the beginning of the dynasty, the military examinations were not instituted until 1464; and, after a period of irregularity, they were scheduled at three-year intervals beginning in 1504, as were the civil examinations. Principal candidates for the examinations were officers' housemen, who were eligible for training in the military schools (*wu-hsüeh*) that were maintained in all principal garrisons and for training in the Confucian schools (*ju-hsüeh*) that the guards were authorized to establish on the pattern of those maintained in prefectures, subprefectures, and counties. Sons of military men were also eligible for consideration to be admitted to the Confucian schools maintained by civil administration units and, for that matter, could compete without discrimination in the civil service recruitment examinations if they were so inclined and had the requisite scholastic talents. One of the most influential civil officials of the whole Ming era, Chang Chü-cheng (1525–82), had such a background, his father having been an ordinary soldier. Chang was a 1547 metropolitan graduate in the civil examinations

84 *TMHT*, 120, p. 2475; 121, pp. 2493–95.

and ultimately, as senior grand secretary, dominated government as de facto regent for the young Wan-li emperor.⁸⁵

The military examinations required a minimal level of literacy in the Confucian tradition and knowledge of important texts on strategy in war, but they principally required high competence in archery and horsemanship. Consequently, although “open” in principle, they realistically offered opportunities for advancement only to men who had grown up in military environments, such as officers’ housemen. Some young hereditary officers also participated in the examinations, hoping for rapid promotions. But the military examinations yielded only about fifty metropolitan graduates every three years, and winning officer status in this fashion did not significantly alter the hereditary character of the officer corps.⁸⁶

After the first century of Ming rule it also became possible, as in the case of the civil service, for men to purchase status as officers. The details of this procedure and its consequences are not clear, but the purchase of officer status must have had even less importance in the military service than the equivalent had in the civil service.

Officers who entered the service in ways other than direct inheritance apparently did not automatically get the privilege of passing their posts on to their heirs. This privilege was awarded them subsequently only on the basis of a special imperial act of grace in recognition of merit in battle.

Once in service, military officers had no specified tenure in office. However, it was the rule that every third year an officer had to demonstrate his continuing competence in archery and horsemanship, and every five years all officers were subjected to evaluations (*k’ao-ch’a*) of their service and fitness. Those in the highest ranks, as in the civil service, were not evaluated by others but were expected to submit self-evaluations (*tsu-ch’en*). If promoted, one received only an acting (*shih*) appointment until he had an opportunity to demonstrate merit, preferably in battle, whereupon the new appointment was made a substantive (*shih*) one. Appointments to the circulating offices, above the guard level, were made only by the emperor, usually on the basis of nominations called for from members of the nobility and other high-ranking officers. If an official failed in an active tactical assignment, it was not uncommon for him to have his status and salary suspended until he proved successful in a specified charge, for example, quelling outlawry in a specified territory. No extensive statistics are available concerning the careers of military officers, but the evidence at hand gives the impression that their tenure was more

85 See *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 514–15; and Chang’s biography in DMB, pp. 53–61.

86 *MS*, 70, pp. 1708–09; *TMHT*, 135, pp. 2775–78.

TABLE 1.5
Prestige titles awarded to military officials

Rank	Title
1a	(1: highest) Specially Promoted Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (<i>t'e-chin kuang-lu ta-fu</i>) (2: lowest) Specially Promoted Grand Master for Glorious Happiness (<i>t'e-chin jung-lu ta-fu</i>)
1b	(1) Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (<i>kuang-lu ta-fu</i>) (2) Grand Master for Glorious Happiness (<i>jung-lu ta-fu</i>)
2a	(1) General of Dragons and Tigers (<i>lung-hu Chiang-chün</i>) (2) General of Imperial Insignia (<i>chin-wu Chiang-chün</i>) (3) General of Imperial Cavalry (<i>p'iao-chi Chiang-chün</i>)
2b	(1) Supporter-general of the State (<i>feng-kuo Chiang-chün</i>) (2) Pacifier-general of the State (<i>ting-kuo Chiang-chün</i>) (3) Defender-general of the State (<i>chen-kuo Chiang-chün</i>)
3a	(1) General of Manifest Militancy (<i>chao-wu Chiang-chün</i>) (2) General of Manifest Resolution (<i>chao-i Chiang-chün</i>) (3) General of Manifest Courage (<i>chao-yung Chiang-chün</i>)
3b	(1) General for Contenting Those Afar (<i>an-yüan Chiang-chün</i>) (2) General for Pacifying Those Afar (<i>ting-yüan Chiang-chün</i>) (3) General for Subduing Those Afar (<i>huai-yüan Chiang-chün</i>)
4a	(1) General of Far-reaching Awesomeness (<i>kuang-wei Chiang-chün</i>) (2) General of Projected Awesomeness (<i>hsüan-wei Chiang-chün</i>) (3) General of Bright Awesomeness (<i>ming-wei Chiang-chün</i>)
4b	(1) General of Faithful Militancy (<i>hsin-wu Chiang-chün</i>) (2) General of Shining Militancy (<i>hsien-wu Chiang-chün</i>) (3) General of Projected Militancy (<i>hsüan-wu Chiang-chün</i>)
5a	(1) General of Military Integrity (<i>wu-chieh Chiang-chün</i>) (2) General of Military Virtue (<i>wu-te Chiang-chün</i>)
5b	(1) General of Military Ingenuity (<i>wu-lieh Chiang-chün</i>) (2) General of Military Resoluteness (<i>wu-i Chiang-chün</i>)
6a	(1) Commandant of Sustained Faithfulness (<i>ch'eng-hsin hsiao-wei</i>) (2) Commandant of Manifest Faithfulness (<i>chao-hsin hsiao-wei</i>)
6b	(1) Loyal and Militant Commandant (<i>chung-wu hsiao-wei</i>) (2) Loyal and Illustrious Commandant (<i>chung-hsien hsiao-wei</i>) ⁸⁸

secure than that of civil officials and that they were held to lesser standards of conduct, partly because they were commonly illiterate.⁸⁷

In early Ming times, military officers were permitted to retire at the age of fifty; for most of the dynasty, however, sixty was the normal retirement age. There were no retirement pensions, since a family member succeeded to the retiree's post and stipend. If an officer died on duty and had no sons or younger brothers, his wife or a living parent was awarded his full pay for three years and half pay thereafter, indefinitely. If there was a son or younger brother too young to inherit immediately, he was paid half salary until he was able to take up the inheritable post at the age of twenty.

⁸⁷ See Hucker, *The censorial system of Ming China*, pp. 126–29, 195–97, 307, table 4 and 309, table 10.

⁸⁸ TMHT, 122, p. 2513.

TABLE 1.6
Merit titles awarded to military officials

Rank	Title
1a	Left and Right Pillar of State (<i>tso, yu chu-kuo</i>)
1b	Pillar of State (<i>chu-kuo</i>)
2a	Senior Military Protector (<i>shang hu-chün</i>)
2b	Military Protector (<i>hu-chün</i>)
3a	Senior Commandant-in-chief of Light Chariots (<i>shang ch'ing-ch'e tu-wei</i>)
3b	Commandant-in-chief of Light Chariots (<i>ch'ing-ch'e tu-wei</i>)
4a	Senior Commandant-in-chief of Cavalry (<i>shang-chi tu-wei</i>)
4b	Commandant-in-Chief of Cavalry (<i>chi tu-wei</i>)
5a	Commandant of Spirited Cavalry (<i>hsiao-chi wei</i>)
5b	Commandant of Flying Cavalry (<i>fei-chi wei</i>)
6a	Commandant of Fleet-as clouds Cavalry (<i>yün-chi wei</i>)
6b	Commandant of Militant Cavalry (<i>wu-chi wei</i>). ⁸⁹

Military officers were entitled to prestige titles (*san-kuan*) corresponding to their ranks, as were civil officials. There were thirty such titles, of which the four highest were identical with the most esteemed prestige titles granted to civil officials. The whole series was as shown in Table 1.5, for regular ranks as indicated.

For extraordinary achievement, like their civil service counterparts, military officers were also awarded merit titles (*hsün*), corresponding to regular ranks as shown in Table 1.6. The most favored or distinguished officers were appointed to the noble ranks of duke (*kung*), marquis (*hou*), or earl (*po*), in descending order of esteem, with or without hereditary privileges according to the decision of the appointing emperor.

Because of all these categories of honor, the full designation of an eminent military man might be Earl of P'ing-chiang (noble title), Commissioner-in-chief of the Center (nominal status, rank 1a), and Regional Commander of the Yen-sui Defense Area (actual duty assignment); or Senior Military Protector (merit title), General of Imperial Insignia (prestige title), Assistant Commander of the Yang-chou Guard (hereditary status, rank 4a) promoted to Assistant Commissioner-in-chief of the Rear (nominal status, rank 2a), Regional Vice Commander of Shensi (actual duty assignment). To avoid confusion, an officer, while on detached service away from his nominal post, which, as often as not, was his original inherited post, was identified by a title-prefix signifying that he merely received his salary (*tai-feng*) in that capacity, whereas whoever actually performed the duties of the post was designated as being in charge of the affairs (*kuan . . . shih*) of the post.

⁸⁹ TMHT, 118, pp. 2450-51.

Military officers received salaries identical, rank by rank, to those of their counterparts in the civil service, ranging from 1,044 bushels of grain per year for rank 1a, down to ninety-six bushels per year for rank 6b (see Table 1.4). As in the case of civil officials, parts of these salaries came to be commuted into money or commodities other than grain; but military officers did not suffer from the abundance and disadvantageousness of commutations that made the real incomes of civil officials so low. The salaries of military officers were relatively more substantial. Moreover, in all cases where military officers and civil officials served at the same hierarchical level, whether in the central government or in the provinces, the military officers held higher rank than the civil officials. Thus, in the central government, the senior officers of chief military commissions ranked 1a whereas the civil service head of a ministry ranked 2a, and senior military officers of provincial agencies ranked 2a, whereas senior civil officials of comparable-level agencies ranked 2b or 3a. Particularly since the high-ranking military officers were likely to have noble titles, when officers and officials at any level gathered for consultation, as they were often called on to do, the civil officials normally had to give precedence to the military officials.

Other benefits more commonly enjoyed by military officers than by civil officials were special, supplementary rewards that emperors often distributed. After every military action, however minor, it was customary for emperors to distribute gifts to the officers and soldiers involved, on a scale that reckoned action against Mongols most rewarding and, below several intermediate categories, action against domestic bandits least rewarding. Promotions could be earned in such ways, but so could gifts of silver, paper money, suits of clothing, and bolts of cloth. The most precise scale spelled out the value of decapitating or capturing enemies, taking account of how many enemies were killed or captured and whether or not those killed or captured included enemy leaders.⁹⁰

Above all, military officers notoriously abused their authority and augmented their incomes by making false reports of troop strength in their units and by taking for themselves the rations provided for nonexistent soldiers, by withholding rations and allowances provided for their existing troops, by usurping, for their own use, agricultural lands set aside by the state to provide troop rations, by accepting bribes from soldiers seeking release from service or other special favors, and by extorting money from every conceivable victim. Such misconduct was, of course, not universal in the officer corps, but corruption was so widespread that the reputation of the corps steadily

90 *TMHT*, 123, pp. 2519–39.

declined through the dynasty.⁹¹ This decline paralleled, and may have had some cause-and-effect relation to, a decline in the self-esteem of the officer corps from the 1400s on, as military commands came increasingly under eunuch supervision and then under civil service leadership. In general, by the 1600s, the officer corps had been reduced to the status of technicians ordered about by eunuchs or civil dignitaries, in spite of what has been said previously about officers' advantages in ranks, salaries, and so on. Even so, the hereditary officers of the guards continued to the end of the dynasty to be the backbone of such military strength as the Ming dynasty possessed.

The soldiery

The Ming military establishment, commonly called the *wei-so* system in abbreviated reference to the guards (*wei*), together with their constituent battalions (*ch'ien-hu so*), and the companies (*po-hu so*) that were the basic units in the establishment, is best known for its heavy reliance on the concept of a self-perpetuating, hereditary soldiery. The system is commonly compared, even in the *Official history of the Ming*, to the garrison-militia (*fu-ping*) system that is credited with the great military achievements of the early T'ang era.⁹² However, among many differences that might be cited,⁹³ the fundamental distinction is that the T'ang garrison-militia consisted of professional career soldiers, whereas the Ming *wei-so* soldiery comprised a hereditary caste.

The hereditary categorizing of people in classes was not unprecedented in China's native tradition, but the practice had significantly declined in T'ang and especially in Sung times. During the Yüan dynasty, however, the Mongols tried to freeze all their subjects in a multitude of precise social stratifications. The Ming founder's generally egalitarian attitudes, combined with the social convulsions of the Yüan-Ming transition, led to a loosening of the strict Yüan class delineations, so that most Ming families were registered simply as civilian families (*min-hu*). The next largest category was that of military families (*chün-hu*), and the only other broad category, and a relatively small one, was that of artisan families (*chiang-hu*), which principally included hereditary craft laborers of all sorts, some of whom were full-time workers in state manufactories at the capital that produced most of the finished goods, luxuries and necessities alike, required for palace and government use. Other artisan families plied their trades freely throughout the country, but could be called

91 Some of these abuses are discussed in Sun Chin-ming, *Chung-kuo ping chih shih* (Taipei, 1960), pp. 171–73, and in Hsieh Yü-tsai, “Ming tai wei so chih tu hsing shuai k'ao,” pp. 213–24. Also see Wang Yü-chüan, *Ming tai ti chün t' un, passim*, esp. pp. 290–313.

92 On the T'ang *fu-ping* system, see *Sui and T'ang China, 589–906, Part 1*, Vol. 3, ed. Denis C. Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 13, 97, 175–76, 207–08.

93 See Ch'en Wen-shih, “Ming tai wei so ti chün,” esp. pp. 201–03.

on by the government for requisitioned goods or for temporary service on government projects, especially palace construction in the capital.

Families of the military category bore the assigned responsibility of providing one able-bodied male each for service in the guards and of providing a replacement for him whenever necessary. As in the case of officers, the obligation was a narrowly specified one. A family in Hu-kuang, for example, might be responsible for providing a soldier in a particular company of a particular battalion of a particular guard garrisoned in the far northeast, in modern Manchuria. As a result, if two vacancies occurred in such a guard in Manchuria, one replacement might be sought from a particular family in a particular village in Hu-kuang, whereas the other might be sought, with similar specificity, in Chekiang province. For bearing such responsibilities, military families were relieved of the obligation to provide labor service requisitioned by local government agencies, up to the equivalent, roughly, of what would be required from any one male in a civilian family. In other regards, military families were indistinguishable from the civilian families among whom they lived. There was no discrimination against them or in their favor.

Families acquired status as military families in various ways. Men who were in the military service of the founding emperor, or those who were his allied generals in the era of the dynastic founding, automatically found their families registered as military families when the empire was established, and they settled in garrisons to ensure the subjugation and stability of new regions as they were consolidated. Such men and their hereditary successors were known as old campaigners (*ts'ung-cheng*). A second large contingent of the early Ming regular army was called adherents (*kuei-fu*). These were men originally employed in the armies of the Yüan dynasty or of the regional warlords who contended for supremacy with the Hung-wu emperor, who surrendered to, and entered the service of, the new Ming dynasty. It is said that, whenever the Hung-wu emperor gained control over a new territory, his officers visited every village and called on all males to choose whether to be civilian subjects or Ming soldiers, and their decisions categorized their families in perpetuity. Men who chose military service were subsequently called adherents. The third component of the Ming guard personnel consisted of men who were sentenced to military service in frontier garrisons for various crimes as exiles or sentenced soldiers (*che-fa*). Their families were transferred from the civilian to the military registers and assigned to bear the responsibilities of military families hereditarily.

Conscription (*to-chi*) of men in civilian families was also relied on in the early Ming decades to keep the army at full strength. Under the Yung-lo emperor, it was ordered that every civilian family with three or more sons must give one son for military service, while the other families were designated as reserve

families (*t'ieh-hu*). Each new conscript founded a new military family with hereditary obligations. Men were drafted from reserve families with more than one son, if additional military crises arose.⁹⁴ Conscription in this fashion could not have been imposed universally or perennially; it was apparently an occasional, geographically limited practice. It seems nonetheless to have produced a significant proportion of the empire's military families by the 1420s.

There seems to have been no fixed retirement age for soldiers. In the early Ming period, seventy seems to have been considered the maximum service age; later, sixty was apparently the maximum. But the important consideration always was a soldier's fitness to serve. Whenever a soldier became too old or too ill to perform his duties, or if he died or was seriously wounded in service, a replacement was sought. A boy over the age of ten, if sturdy and in good health, was considered suitable to be "enlisted" for future service, and, at thirteen or fourteen, such boys were apparently thought ready to serve.⁹⁵

Replacements normally came from a soldier's immediate family, who lived together at his guard garrison. These might include his younger brothers, who were encouraged, if not required, to join him, participate in training, and follow him in battle, as was the case with officers' housemen (*she-jen*). These extra males in a soldier's household were known as surplus men (*yü-chün* or *yü-ting*), and constituted a kind of ready reserve. If a soldier died, or otherwise had to be replaced, and there was no successor at hand, then his guard officers reported to the Ministry of War. The ministry checked its records to determine which military family was represented by the man to be replaced, and notified the appropriate local authorities. District officials then called on the responsible family to produce a replacement, and he was dispatched to take the family's designated place in the ranks. The elders of the family presumably had some discretion in designating the replacement, so long as he was of serviceable age and in acceptable physical condition; but it was illegal for the family to hire or adopt an unrelated male to serve. If the responsible family could no longer be located, or if it had no eligible and serviceable males, then the local authorities notified the Ministry of War and the case was closed.

This scheme for perpetuating a large standing army was neat in principle, but it generated problems even in the founding reign. As early as 1370, it was reported that almost 40,000 troops had deserted, and thereafter, abuses in the replacement procedure steadily increased as the central government

94 Wu Han, "Ming tai ti chün ping," pp. 104–05; Hsieh Yü-ts'ai, "Ming tai wei so chih tu hsing shuai k'ao," pp. 174–75.

95 *TMHT*, 137, esp. pp. 2795–801. Cf. Ch'en Wen-shih, "Ming-tai wei-so ti chün," p. 194.

put pressure on guard officers and local authorities to fill the depleted ranks. When an originally designated military family fled or migrated from its village to evade future responsibility, the local authorities commonly seized anyone for impressment into service, especially anyone of the same surname or who was currently working the departed family's land. Soldiers in service commonly made false reports about their native places to shield their kinsmen from being called. Families often offered up old or otherwise unfit males as replacements. Replacements frequently disappeared en route to their posts. N'er-do-wells hired themselves out to military families to serve as replacements, reported to their posts as specified, but soon deserted only to hire themselves out to other families in succession, thus turning up for very brief duty in several garrisons under false names. Some guard officers, to avoid being punished for high desertion rates in their units, sent out their own agents to impress men wherever they were to be found. By the 1420s, the neat-appearing replacement system was notoriously out of order.

Beginning in the Hung-wu reign, special trouble-shooters, usually censorial officials, were dispatched from the capital to "clean up and put in order the military ranks" (*ch'ing-li chün-wu*). By the 1420s teams of officials were periodically sent throughout the country on such troop purification (*ch'ing-chün*, an abbreviation of *ch'ing-li chün-wu*) assignments, and from 1440 on through the 1500s such assignments were a regular responsibility of the censorial agencies. In 1428 one troop-purifying censor illegally impressed hundreds of men for service and cruelly abused village heads who protested. When his misconduct was denounced at court, 152 of his replacements were released but 1,239 others were left in lifetime service on the principle that they had already undertaken service and accepted pay for it. Their only consolation was that hereditary military obligations were not imposed on their families.⁹⁶

Despite continuing troop-purification efforts, the state of the *wei-so* establishment continued to deteriorate. By the early 1500s, it was claimed that 80 to 90 percent of the troops in many garrisons had deserted; and, by the last half of the sixteenth century, it was said that *wei-so* troops were not only unable to destroy enemies, they were incapable of defending themselves.⁹⁷

Life in the guards was undesirable partly because of the ways in which soldiers were abused and taken advantage of by their officers.⁹⁸ More specifically,

96 *MS*, 92, pp. 2255–8; Hucker, *The censorial system of Ming China*, pp. 75–77. Cf. Ch'en Wen-shih, "Ming tai wei so ti chün," pp. 193–98; Hsieh Yü-ts'ai, "Ming tai wei so chih tu hsing shuai k'ao," pp. 213–24; and Wu Han, "Ming-tai ti chün-ping," pp. 111–24.

97 Wu Han, "Ming-tai ti chün-ping," pp. 112, 117. The decline of the Ming military system is discussed from a vivid personal viewpoint in Ray Huang, 1587, *A year of no significance: the Ming dynasty in decline* (New Haven and London, 1981), pp. 157–64, 175–76.

98 Also see Ch'en Wen-shih, "Ming tai wei so ti chün," pp. 198–200.

beginning on a large scale in the 1420s, guards garrisoned along the route of the newly rehabilitated Grand Canal were required to provide transport service for the tax grain that was shipped from the productive Yangtze delta prefectures northward to Peking and to the frontier garrisons. Soldiers assigned to transport duties lived especially burdensome lives and deserted in large numbers.⁹⁹

Perhaps the most abused soldiers were those whom the guards regularly had to send in rotational patterns to Peking and Nanking from the early 1400s on, for service in training divisions (*ying*) at the capitals. The original purpose of these troop rotations was to give soldiers intensive training under competent generals at the capitals, while at the same time providing large contingents of combat-ready troops, especially at Peking, should the need for any large-scale defensive actions or campaigning arise. The training was not very effective partly because eunuchs early on came to play important command roles in the training divisions. The training divisions constituted the grand army that the emperor Ying-tsung led to disaster at T'u-mu in 1449. Fresh troops were hastily called up from the provinces to create a new defense force at Peking, and training was again emphasized. Before long, however, the training divisions lapsed into their former ineffectiveness, so that soldiers assigned to them became the personal servants of eunuchs, nobles, and foppish generals, or were put to work as labor gangs on palace construction projects. Whereas, in the Yung-lo reign, the training divisions seem to have provided an active army of 700,000 or 800,000 men, in the 1500s, their soldiers who were actually available for military training and service sank to as few as 20,000. Other assignees (100,000 more or less) were officially acknowledged to be nothing more than menial laborers, despised and mistreated by all. Whole units of them were labeled oldsters (*lao-chia*) and were considered unfit for military duties. Whenever the prospect of active combat loomed, many members of the supposed combat-ready units clamored to be reclassified as oldsters. In 1550, when the Mongol prince Altan broke through the Great Wall and threatened Peking, the minister of war in charge of the training divisions led an army of some 50,000 or 60,000 men out to confront the marauders. However, as soon as the Mongols were sighted, the official history reports, the soldiers all began weeping and sniveling and refused to fight, while their officers paled and could do nothing but gape at one another in terror.¹⁰⁰ The minister in command was subsequently

99 See Hoshi Ayao, *The Ming tribute grain system*, trans. Mark Elvin, University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies: Michigan Abstracts of Chinese and Japanese Works on Chinese History, no. 1 (1969), esp. pp. 50–54.

100 *MJ*, 89, pp. 2179–80. On this incident, see Mote and Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, pp. 475–76.

put to death. Finally, in 1644, when the capital troops marched out to destroy the marauding armies of the rebel Li Tzu-ch'eng, they reportedly broke ranks and fled when they first heard cannon fire, and, except for 3,000 eunuch troops, the capital was left defenseless.¹⁰¹

The base pay of a *wei-so* soldier was one bushel of grain per month, but the actual amount received varied depending on the number of dependents in each man's immediate family. Cavalrymen were paid at a higher rate than infantrymen, presumably to provide for the upkeep of their mounts. Special grain allowances were scheduled for soldiers on campaign or en route to a capital training division. All clothing, weapons, and equipment were provided by the government. Grain rations were partly commuted into other forms of payment, but the prescribed payments in grain seem to have been sufficient for feeding soldiers and their dependents. However, the abusive treatment of soldiers by their officers included so many ways of reducing soldiers' real incomes that, during the last half of the dynasty, soldiers in service were repeatedly said to be living in the direst poverty.

From the mid-1440s, the *wei-so* forces were supplemented throughout the country by local civilian militias (*min-ping* or *min-chuang*). At the grass-roots level, people everywhere were organized into registration units generally called communities (*li*), and community heads were expected to keep peace within such units. Depending on the number of communities in their jurisdictions (that is, depending on population density) county magistrates were normally expected to organize militia forces of several hundred men for training, usually in the agricultural off-season, so that *wei-so* soldiers need not be bothered with small-scale banditry or local disturbances. Militiamen, however, were not a national resource to be called on to do *wei-so* duty; they were expected to serve only in their home areas and on a very part-time basis.¹⁰²

When the cumulative weaknesses of the *wei-so* system became too apparent to be ignored, the government turned to recruitment (*chao-mu*), that is, to the enlistment of paid volunteer soldiers from civilian and artisan families as well as from the ranks of officers' housemen (*she-jen*) and surplus men (*yü-ting*). This practice occurred on a very localized, very temporary basis as early as the Yung-lo reign. After the Ming defeat at T'u-mu in 1449, recruiting was relied on extensively to help restore a defense force at Peking on an emergency basis. By the end of the fifteenth century, recruitment had become a standard practice in all situations requiring more than passive defense. Dur-

101 The capital training divisions are fully discussed in *MS*, 89, pp. 2176–84. Also see Wu Han, "Ming tai ti chün ping," pp. 105–11.

102 *MS*, 91, pp. 2249–51; Fu Wei-lin, *Ming shu*, ch. 72 (Vol. 2, pp. 1452–53).

ing the latter 1500s it was such recruits who struggled with the Japan-based coastal marauders called *Wo-k'ou* (*Wako*) and northern raiders under Altan and other Mongol chiefs. Eventually recruits helped turn the tide of Japan's invasions of Korea in the 1590s. The *wei-so* system by then was barely able to keep tax grain convoys moving along the Grand Canal, to provide labor for large-scale construction projects, and to maintain a minimal facade of static defense in strategic areas. Whenever any uncommon military need arose, special recruits (*mu-ping*) had to be called up.¹⁰³

The Ming government made a terminological distinction between the hereditary soldiers of the *wei-so* system, called *chün*, and all other kinds of fighting men, who were called *ping*. The distinction seems impossible to match precisely in English; it was not merely a distinction between soldiers and militiamen, or between regular soldiers and reservists, or between regulars and irregulars. During the last century of the dynasty various categories of *ping* constituted the nearest thing to a regular Ming fighting force, whereas *chün* of the *wei-so* establishment gradually became a force that was partly a group of semi-pensioner garrison farmers and partly a kind of watchmen group that manned defensive fortifications in peace and, it was hoped, in war could delay an enemy until *ping* troops arrived for the serious fighting. *Ping* were recruited from many sources. In small units they were commanded by their natural leaders, but at higher levels they were under the control of *wei-so* officers assigned to the tactical command hierarchy and of the eunuchs or civil dignitaries who supervised them. When the fighting ended, the *ping* troops were paid off and sent home.

Experienced militiamen made useful recruits, and several other groups were especially favored because of their specialized fighting qualities. Along the northern frontier there were settlements of friendly Mongols, Uighurs, and other Inner Asian peoples who were skilled cavalymen familiar with the ways of the steppe raiders who regularly threatened North China. The government often made temporary use of alien soldiers (*i-ping*) recruited from such settlements for defensive action along the Great Wall line. In Hukwang, Szechwan, and the far southwest were large numbers of aboriginal peoples who were only loosely incorporated into the empire and who retained their tribal ways of life. Several aboriginal groups were notoriously fierce fighters who made willing recruits: the Wolfmen (*lang-jen*) of Kweichow and Miao of Yung-shun were used on campaigns in Vietnam in the early 1400s, against Japan-based *Wo-k'ou* raiders on the southeast coast in the 1500s, and

103 On the development and nature of recruitment, see especially Fu Wei-lin, *Mingshu*, ch. 72 (Vol. 2, pp. 1453–54); and Wu Han, “Ming-tai ti chün-ping,” pp. 124–32.

even against the Manchus in the north in the last Ming decades.¹⁰⁴ A female aboriginal chieftan, Ch'in Liang-yü, repeatedly led her Szechwan tribesmen, called bare-staff troops (*po-kan ping*), against domestic rebels who ravaged North China from the 1620s on.¹⁰⁵ There were difficulties in using aboriginal troops in densely populated parts of China, for in Chinese eyes they were crude and undisciplined, and they seldom left an area they had helped defend without having done about as much damage through their rowdiness as the enemy had done.

Chinese groups that were often called on to help quell disturbances afar, called local troops (*hsiang-ping*), included men from parts of modern Honan who were excellent mountaineers skilled with daggers; tough miners (*k'uang-ping*) from various localities; specialists in fighting with long staffs from Shantung; monks from Buddhist monasteries that emphasized the martial arts; boxers from Ch'üan-chou, Fukien; expert stonethrowers from modern Hopei; sailors from the Fukien coast; and salt workers from several areas, who were among the few Chinese who readily used cannons.¹⁰⁶ Some local leaders, and eventually even such generals as Ch'i Chi-kuang, raised and led specially recruited forces with the support of local authorities. They were known by the names of their leaders, as for example in his case, the Ch'i army (*Ch'i-chia ping*).

After the Manchus rebelled against Ming in 1618, strains on the military system intensified. The situation got still worse through the 1620s, when eunuch interference in government and partisan feuds among civil officials almost brought the imperial government to a standstill, while new challenges appeared in the form of domestic rebellions.¹⁰⁷ One proposal, repeatedly advanced, was for Ming to bribe or otherwise entice its old enemies, the Mongols, to fall upon and rout the Manchus. *Wei-so* troops from the central and western defense areas along the Great Wall were shifted eastward to help stem the Manchu advance, but many deserted en route. Capital officials were dispatched in all directions to hire recruits in groups of 5,000 and more, but few of them received any training and even fewer ever arrived in the combat zone. In a most unusual editorial comment, the official day-by-day court chronicle (the *Veritable records*) lamented in a 1621 entry:

Since trouble arose in the east [i.e., since the Manchu uprising], there has been no worse calamity than troop recruitment. This is because soldiers who have been recruited have all been marketplace rowdies, incompetent to defend against enemies

104 *MS*, 91, pp. 2249–51.

105 See Ch'in Liang-yü's biography, in *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period*, ed. A. W. Hummel (Washington, DC, 1943–44), Vol. 1, pp. 168–69.

106 *MS*, 91, pp. 2251–52.

107 See James B. Parsons, *The peasant rebellions of the late Ming dynasty* (Tucson, 1970).

but more than competent to make [domestic] trouble. In all, many millions in silver and coins have been wasted, and not a single soldier has ever been obtained. The worst [recruits] have deserted and become bandits; wicked people and starving people alike have rebelled and joined them. There have been many such instances in the Central Plain!¹⁰⁸

Considering the hopeless state of the Ming military establishment as reported both by contemporary critics and later analysts, it seems almost miraculous that the Ming empire managed somehow to hold out against the Manchus (and the Mongols, who soon became Manchu allies) beyond the Great Wall and simultaneously against massive domestic rebellions until as late as 1644.

Fiscal support for the military

Although Ming fiscal administration is described elsewhere in this volume (see Chapter 2), a brief survey of how the military establishment was supported seems in order here, primarily because the concept that the military should be self-supporting was an integral element of the original *wei-so* system. The Hung-wu emperor, having risen from the status of impoverished orphan, repeatedly insisted that his armies must not be a burden on the civilian taxpayers. He boasted, somewhat inaccurately, that he managed to maintain a million-man army without any cost at all to the civilian population. The basis for such claims was Ming's adoption of a Yüan practice – the establishment of army farms (*chün-t'u*), or as they were more generally known, state farms (*t'un-tien*).¹⁰⁹

As Ming armies progressively gained control of the empire, the Ming state fell heir to countless acres of agricultural land that had been abandoned in the turmoil of the last Yüan years of Mongol rule or had been the property of the Yüan state and its Mongol nobility. The Hung-wu emperor also confiscated the property of many large landlords, especially those in the affluent southeast. Thus, there came into being a large category of state lands (*kuan-t'ien*), some of which was opened to reclamation by homesteaders, some of which was rented out to civilian farmers, but much of which was turned over to *wei-so* units as they settled into garrisons. An attempt was made to provide each company (*po-hu so*) with a farm (*t'un*) of its own. The original idea was to provide land at a rate of fifty *mou* per soldier, and it was expected that the troops, by serving as part-time farmers and part-time soldiers, could produce enough food grain to supply the whole military establishment. The general rule was that, in ordinary times, training and tactical assignments

108 *MSL*, *Hsi-tsung shih-lu*, 4, p. 9b.

109 The most thorough study of Ming army farms is Wang Yü-ch'üan, *Ming tai ti chün t'un*. Also see Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century Ming China*, pp. 63–68.

needed to occupy only about 30 percent of any company's manpower with the remaining 70 percent being delegated to work the company's farm. In some instances, however, there were so-called state farm battalions (*t'un-t'ien ch'ien-hu so*), either attached to guards or independent, that had full-time farming responsibilities.

However well the system of army farms might have served its purpose in the areas of China well suited to agriculture, it could not work well in support of the troops that had to be concentrated along the Great Wall line of defense, where the land was at best suited only to marginal farming. The fact that the Grand Canal transport system was inoperative during the early decades of the Ming, and that hazardous sea transport had to be relied on to move grain surpluses from the south to the needy north, increased supply problems. So the Hung-wu court revived and adapted an ingenious Sung dynasty plan to overcome the problem by exploiting the traditional state monopoly on salt distribution.

The center of salt production was in the central coastal region of east China. There, wholesale merchants traditionally purchased vouchers entitling them to specified quantities of salt that could be retailed in prescribed sections of the country. In 1370, it was proclaimed that such vouchers would no longer be sold, but could only be earned by merchants' delivery of grain to the northern frontier garrisons – a system known as the equitable exchange of grain for salt (*k'ai-chung*). Since it was no easier for merchants to ship grain to the Great Wall than for the government, but since the profits merchants could earn in salt distribution were temptingly enormous, it was not long before rich merchants began to develop what came to be called merchant farms (*shang-t'un*) in the north, from which tenant farmers, lured into service, could produce grain for delivery to nearby garrisons so as to earn the salt vouchers coveted by their masters.¹¹⁰

The combination of army farms and merchant farms seems to have provided needed food supplies for the military establishment well into the 1420s. Then, as the Grand Canal transport system began to deliver grain to the new capital at Peking and resettlement and rehabilitation in the northern provinces began to make it possible for the northern provinces to supply the frontier garrisons with grain tax subsidies, the *k'ai-chung* system of grain-for-salt exchange played a steadily less important role, even though it continued as an element of the frontier supply system into the 1600s. Meanwhile,

110 See Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century Ming China*, pp. 193–95; Wang Ch'ung-wu, "The Ming system of merchant colonization," in E-tu Zen Sun and John de Francis, trans., *Chinese social history* (Washington, DC, 1956), pp. 299–308; and Hsieh Yü-ts'ai, "Ming-tai wei-so chih-tu hsing-shuai k'ao," esp. pp. 201–04.

soldiers in the interior were steadily losing their military skills and becoming full-time, but ineffectual farmer-tenants of the state. During the 1500s, army farms steadily fell into disuse, or reverted to de facto private ownership, as officers and large landlords took them over as private holdings.

When the T'u-mu disaster of 1449 exposed the weaknesses of the *wei-so* system and the government began turning to recruitment in support of it, there began a steady drain from government treasuries to subsidize the soldiery. Although there was no budgetary provision for such a development, the central government began issuing annual military subsidies (*nien-li*) in silver to help maintain the frontier garrisons.¹¹¹ Through the 1500s, Peking regularly paid out more than 2 million and, later, more than 3 million taels of silver in such subsidies from treasuries that were replenished with annual revenues totaling only about 4 million taels of silver. The Korean campaigns in the 1590s reportedly cost an extra 10 million taels, and, after the Manchus rose in rebellion, subsidies escalated rapidly. From 1618 through 1627, attempts to contain the Manchus cost an estimated 60 million taels. Surtax after surtax had to be imposed on the civilian population: the original ideal of a self-supporting soldiery, which had never been fully realized, was now totally dead. In the dynasty's final years, new recruits could not be paid promised enlistment bounties, the payment of troops in the field was far in arrears, and the central government was bankrupt.

THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

In its structural organization, the mature Ming government resembled a pyramid with the emperor at its apex. The pyramid had three faces or sides comprised of hierarchies of agencies for general administration, for administering the military establishment (considered here, for the sake of simplicity, only in its administrative and not in its tactical aspect), and for administering ombudsman-like surveillance and judicial supervision. The pyramid and each of its three faces had three tiers or levels: central, provincial, and local. Overall, it was a neat, well-articulated structure in which authority was centralized in the person of the emperor to a degree not previously achieved by a major dynasty, and in which, responsibilities were clearly defined and differentiated. The founding emperor, echoing a view expressed earlier by Kubilai Khan, said that the general-administration hierarchy was the "root" or mainframe of governance, the military hierarchy commanded

¹¹¹ See Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century Ming China*, p. 68; Wu Han, "Ming tai ti chün ping," esp. pp. 135–41; and Hsieh Yü-ts'ai, "Ming tai wei so chih tu hsing shuai k'ao," esp. pp. 204–09.

TABLE 1.7
Government hierarchies

	Central	Regional	Local
Administration	Six Ministries	Provincial Administration Commissions	Circuit intendants detached from Provincial Administration Commissions; Prefectures, Subprefectures, and Counties
Military	Five Chief Military Commissions	Regional Military Commissions	Guards, Battalions and Companies
Surveillance	Censorate	Provincial Surveillance Commissions; also Regional Inspectors detached from the Censorate	Circuit Intendants detached from Provincial Commissions; also inspectors of various kinds detached from the Censorate

the soldiery, and the surveillance-judicial hierarchy disciplined and rectified all agencies of government.¹¹² The military personnel discussed in the preceding section staffed the military hierarchy. Civil officials and their sub-official functionaries staffed both the general-administration and the surveillance-judicial hierarchies, and individual civil officials moved easily back and forth between these two hierarchies in the course of their careers. That is to say, no special personnel corps separate from the civil service staffed the surveillance-judicial agencies.

The basic elements in each of these hierarchies at each level are summarized in Table 1.7. All these elements, together with those less basic, will be described below, hierarchy by hierarchy.

The evolution of new institutions

At the local level, agencies of the Ming government were retained more or less intact from the immediately preceding dynasties. The only significant departures from the native tradition were the hereditary and theoretically self-supporting aspects of the local military establishment, and these had been foreshadowed in the Yüan era of Mongol domination. At the central and pro-

¹¹² Sun Ch'eng-tse, *Cb'un ming mengyü lu*, 48, pp. 5b–6a. Speaking at the beginning of Ming, the emperor actually referred to what were then considered the Three Great Offices (*san ta-fu*): the Secretariat (*chung-shu sheng*), forerunner of the six ministries and later the grand secretariat; the Chief Military Commission (*tu-tu-fu*), forerunner of the Five Chief Military Commissions; and the Censorate. Kubi-lai Khan's comment was "The Secretariat is my left hand, the Bureau of Military Affairs is my right hand, and the Censorate is the means for my keeping both hands healthy." See Kao I-han, *Chung-kuo yü shih chih tu ti yen kao* (Shanghai, 1933), p. 43.

vincial levels, however, new organizational patterns evolved in Ming times that gave the mature Ming government a distinctively new look in comparison to the governmental structures of T'ang and Sung times.

Reshaping the Yüan institutional heritage

The Yüan central government was dominated by a Secretariat (*chung-shu sheng*), a Bureau of Military Affairs (*shu-mi yüan*), and a Censorate (*yü-shih t'ai*). Each of these organs had branches with different, overlapping territorial jurisdictions: eleven Branch Secretariats (*hsing chung-shu sheng*) sharing in the supervision of 185 prefectures; only two Branch Censorates (*yü-shih t'ai*) sharing in the supervision of up to twenty-four regional Surveillance Commissions (*t'i-hsing an-ch' a ssu*); and a shifting number of ad hoc Branch Bureaus of Military Affairs (*hsing shu-mi yüan*) sharing in the supervision of up to sixty Regional Military Commands (*tu yüan-shuai fu*).

The rebel movement, from which the Ming founder emerged, adopted the Yüan governmental structure and nomenclature, which were the only models at hand; it called itself a Regional Military Command. In 1356, when the future Hung-wu emperor set up a relatively autonomous government at Nanking, its chief organs were a Branch Secretariat and a Branch Bureau of Military Affairs. In 1364, on assuming the title Prince of Wu, he transformed his regional military establishment into an imperial-scale central government, complete with a Secretariat, a Chief Military Commission (*ta tu-tu fu*, another Yüan term), and a Censorate; and each of these organs had dual heads by 1367. As new territories came under his control, each became a unified province¹¹³ under the control of three coequal agencies: a Branch Secretariat retitled Provincial Administration Commission (*ch'eng-hsüan pu-cheng ssu*) in 1376, a Branch Chief Military Commission retitled Regional Military Commission (*tu chih-hui ssu*) in 1375, and a Provincial Surveillance Commission (*t'i-hsing an-ch' a ssu*). Each of these three commissions had two senior commissioners in each province, and these six commissioners formed a committee that shared responsibility for all provincial affairs. There was no provincial governor who could gain the powers of a provincial warlord.

The year 1380 has always been singled out by historians as the major turning point in the evolution of the structure and the style of government in

113 The Chinese term for province, *sheng*, used since Ming times, reflects the Yüan practice of putting province-size territories under the jurisdiction of branch secretariats (*hsing chung-shu sheng*) and then referring in abbreviated form to these agencies and their territorial jurisdictions alike as, for example, Shantung *sheng*.

Ming times, for, early in that year, the Hung-wu emperor abolished the whole upper echelon of his central government and concentrated power securely in his own hands. This significant change followed the dismissal, trial, and execution of the senior member of the Secretariat, Hu Wei-yung, who was charged with trying to usurp the throne.¹¹⁴ The emperor believed that the existing governmental structure made possible so much centralization of power in the hands of ministers that his own authority was endangered. He consequently dismantled all the central government's top-level organs: the Secretariat, the Chief Military Commission, and the Censorate.

The dismantling of the Secretariat was the most prominent aspect of the 1380 reorganization. Not only the two grand councilors (*ch'eng-hsiang*), but all other executive officials of the Secretariat were deprived of their posts. What remained was a group of six ministries (*liu pu*), formerly subordinate to the Secretariat, but now coequal and uncoordinated, each with a solitary minister (*shang-shu*) in charge. These now came directly under the emperor's personal supervision and comprised the new highest-level agencies in empire's civil administration. The emperor was so vengeful that he decreed no Secretariat should ever again be established, and in his remaining years he repeatedly made pronouncements binding his descendents in perpetuity to impose the death penalty on anyone who dared propose reappointment of grand councilors.

Control over the empire's military establishment was simultaneously reorganized in a somewhat different fashion but with the same fragmenting effect. The former Chief Military Commission was multiplied into five coequal Chief Military Commissions with the directional prefixes Central, Left, Right, Front, and Rear. Each of these was given administrative control over a group of Regional Military Commissions in the provinces and a proportion of the guards that were stationed around the capital and not subordinate to Regional Military Commissions. None of the Five Chief Military Commissions had a prescribed complement of commissioners-in-chief (*tu-tu*): the numbers varied from year to year in no fixed pattern. Thus there was no single general or commissioner in a position to gain control over more than a small segment of the military establishment.

The reorganization of 1380 also affected the surveillance hierarchy harshly, although the harshness was quickly moderated. For reasons that are not clear, the emperor went so far as to abolish all Provincial Surveillance Commissions; but they were all reconstituted the next year. So-called abolition of the Censorate in the capital was a decapitation similar to that inflicted on the

114 On this case, see *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 139–40.

Secretariat. All the senior executive posts were swept away, and censorial responsibilities were delegated directly to numerous junior investigating censors (*ch'ien-ch'a yü-shih*) grouped in a formerly subordinate and now leaderless Investigation Bureau (*ch'a-yüan*). This chaotic condition was rectified in 1382, when the investigating censors were organized into twelve new agencies called circuits (*tao*) named after the then extant provinces, and a chief investigating censor (*ch'ien-ch'a tu yü-shih*) was appointed in each as administrative coordinator. Then in 1383 a new executive superstructure comprised of three grades of censors-in-chief (*tu yü-shih*) was put in place over the circuits and the reunified censorial agency was given a new name, literally Chief Investigation (or Surveillance) Bureau (*tu ch'a-yüan*). The Censorate was thus the only top-echelon agency of the central government to be restored as a unified entity. Even so, the unification was largely superficial; for, in maintaining censorial surveillance over the officialdom at large, all censors individually, and directly, reported to, and were accountable to, the throne.

In short, after 1380 Ming government was structured so that no single appointee could possibly gain overall control of either the military, the general administration, or the surveillance establishment. Executive control remained in the hands of the emperor, who was now sole coordinator for the five Chief Military Commissions, the six ministries, and more than a hundred censors grouped in a Censorate that was unified only for internal personnel and administrative purposes.

The rise of new coordinating agencies

The extreme fragmentation of authority brought about by the Hung-wu emperor in the 1380s, both in the central and in provincial governments, which permitted no one man to function either as a prime minister or as a provincial governor, could hardly survive intact as the dynasty settled into stable administrative routines. Coordination at various levels was imperative; and later emperors, perhaps less diligent and certainly less suspicious than the founder, gradually relinquished some of their inherited, excessively centralized powers. But it is noteworthy that, in doing so, they did not formally change the structure of government bequeathed to them by the dynasty's founder. Instead, coordinating posts were established under the guise of ad hoc appointments; and so they remained, never acquiring the institutional stability that might have made these posts potential bases for challengers of imperial authority. The powers of coordinating officials fluctuated with the changing personalities of the individuals involved, officials and emperors alike.

The seeds of later coordination arrangements in the central government were planted in 1382, when the Hung-wu emperor summoned a group of

low-ranking grand secretaries (*ta hsüeh-shih*) from the Hanlin Academy for detached service in the palace as tutors for the heir apparent and as general consultants to the throne. Early in his reign, the Yung-lo emperor began to make use of such grand secretaries in actual secretarial capacities for processing his administrative paperwork, and by the 1420s the grand secretaries were beginning to play an important executive role in government.

Nominally still members of the Hanlin Academy, grand secretaries were assigned for duty to six specified buildings in the vast imperial palace complex. All six posts were not always filled, but the number of functioning grand secretaries seldom fell below three. Until the middle of the sixteenth century they were identified individually in state documents by their palace posts – for example, as grand secretary in the Hall of Literary Culture (*Wen-hua tien ta hsüeh-shih*). Only thereafter did documents formalize the collective term *nei-ko*, literally “the palace halls,” which is normally rendered in English as the grand secretariat, though the term had been used informally since Yung-lo times.

In the beginning, the grand secretaries seem to have functioned for the most part as individual counselors, being consulted and given separate responsibilities by the emperor, and only sometimes in the loosest kind of collegial group. Even by the sixteenth century they had only vaguely defined collective responsibilities; most of them functioned as aides, still somewhat independent, to one unofficially recognized senior grand secretary (*shou-fu*), literally the “chief assistant” to the emperor. But as a new top-level executive group in the government, they were commonly referred to collectively as the administration (*cheng-fu*).

The rise of grand secretaries to recognized executive authority was facilitated in 1424, when the Hung-hsi emperor gave his grand secretaries substantive appointments as high-ranking officials of regular administrative agencies, relegating their Hanlin posts to the status of concurrent appointments. To make their prestige even more secure, he also conferred on them elegant honorific titles carrying the highest rank possible and good supplementary stipends. Thenceforth, throughout the Ming period, the men who were actually functioning as grand secretaries had their original low Hanlin rank effectively obscured in this way. They always took ritual precedence over other civil officials by virtue of their high honorific ranks and their substantive (though in reality only nominal) appointments in the administrative hierarchy, ordinarily as ministers (*shang-shu*) or vice ministers (*shih-lang*) in the six ministries.

A fortuitous combination of emperors and ministers in the 1420s led to the emergence of the grand secretariat as a stable, important institution. The Yung-lo emperor's two immediate successors, the Hung-hsi (r. 1424–25)

and Hsüan-te (r. 1425–35) emperors, were the first Ming rulers who had been carefully trained to rule by Confucian scholar-officials, and both had unprecedented respect for their literati advisors. The Hsüan-te emperor in particular could not but feel some awe toward men who had tutored his father the Hung-hsi emperor and had served as grand secretaries under his grandfather, the Yung-lo emperor, as well as under his father. The strong personalities of three such men, under the sympathetic rule of these emperors, shaped the grand secretariat into a stable executive institution, despite its informal status. These were “the three Yangs,” whom later historians have consistently listed foremost among the great statesmen-officials of Ming times: Yang Shih-ch’i (1365–1444), a grand secretary from 1402 to his death, Yang Jung (1371–1440), also a grand secretary from 1402 to his death, and Yang P’u (1372–1446), a grand secretary from 1424 to his death. The relationship of these three grand secretaries with the Hung-hsi and Hsüan-te emperors, and especially with the Hung-hsi emperor’s widow, grand empress dowager Chang, who dominated the youthful Cheng-t’ung emperor until her death in 1442, was unquestionably the most balanced and mutually respectful ruler-minister relationship of Ming history.¹¹⁵

Because grand secretaries normally spent their early careers in the Hanlin Academy rather than in active administrative posts, and because circumstances often required them to work in close cooperation with influential palace eunuchs, their relations with the rest of the officialdom were usually uneasy. There was always a tension in Chinese imperial governments between what was called the inner court (*nei-t’ing*) and the outer court (*wai-t’ing*) – that is, between the emperor and those who personally served him on one hand, and the officialdom that administered the empire under his direction on the other. The men who in Ming times served as functioning ministers and vice ministers in the six ministries were almost always men with considerable administrative experience, not only in the capital, but in the provinces as well. To them, the grand secretaries seemed to be officials with no roots in the outer court, where they themselves had achieved eminence, who acted as representatives and spokesmen of the inner court. That is, the grand secretariat was considered a symbol and instrument of imperial authority, not of ministerial or bureaucratic interests. In consequence, grand secretaries often found themselves in the roles of mediators trusted neither by the emperors they served nor by the officialdom they aspired to lead. What influence they were able to wield, in either direction, did not derive from their institutional

115 See the biographies of the three Yangs in DMB; and Tilemann Grimm, “Das Neiko der Ming-Zeit von den Anfängen bis 1506,” *Oriens Extremus*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1954), pp. 139–77. Cf. Tu Nai-chi, *Ming tai nei ko chih tu* (Taipei, 1967) and Ch’ien Mu, *Chung-kuo li tai cheng chih te shih* (Hong Kong, 1952), pp. 79–85.

roles, which made them less than prime ministers by far; it derived solely from the force of their personalities. Such circumstances nevertheless made possible, under inattentive later emperors, the exercise of almost dictatorial power over the government by such senior grand secretaries as the notoriously corrupt Yen Sung (1480–1565), who served in the grand secretariat from 1542 to 1562, and the legalist-minded reformer Chang Chü-cheng (1525–82), who served in the grand secretariat from 1567 to 1582.¹¹⁶

At the provincial level, the need for coordination of the Provincial Administration Commission, Regional Military Commission, and Provincial Surveillance Commission gradually brought into being imperial delegates whose powers, although adequate for the purpose of coordination, fell short of those that would be suggested by the title provincial governor. In 1392, the Hung-wu emperor sent his heir apparent to “tour and soothe” (*hsün-fu*) the northwest. This gesture served as a precedent for the Yung-lo emperor in 1421, when, during the period of administrative chaos following transfer of the dynastic capital from Nanking to Peking, he sent a total of twenty-six high capital officials to tour various parts of the empire, “pacifying and soothing” (*an-fu*) the troops and the populace. In subsequent years high ministerial and censorial officials were often sent out on such missions, sometimes “touring and inspecting” (*hsün-shih*) and in other cases, when there were military crises to be dealt with, serving as grand defenders (*chen-shou*).

Beginning in 1430, the Hsüan-te emperor regularly sent metropolitan dignitaries out on such temporary commissions. “Touring pacifiers” (*hsün-fu*) began to appear as resident coordinators in various provinces and, in addition, in special frontier zones and other strategic places, with indefinite tenures that, later in the dynasty, sometimes extended to ten or even twenty years. Since their territorial jurisdictions did not always coincide with the boundaries of a province, the title borne by these dignitaries might best be rendered grand coordinator, rather than provincial governor. Such an official normally supervised and coordinated the administration of the territory under his jurisdiction.

The grand coordinator concerned himself with both civil and military affairs as local circumstances demanded. When military affairs were a significant element in his jurisdiction, he was normally designated grand coordinator and concurrent military superintendent (*hsün-fu chien t’i-tu chün-wu*) or grand coordinator and concurrent associate military superintendent (*hsün-fu chien tsan-li chün-wu*).¹¹⁷ Since grand coordinators were always civil officials,

¹¹⁶ See the biographies of Yen Sung and Chang Chü-cheng in *DMB*.

¹¹⁷ A complete list of grand coordinator positions is given in *MS*, 73, pp. 1772–80. Cf. *TMHT*, 209, pp. 4155–65.

their emergence was a significant step in the growing dominance of the civil service over the military.

Grand coordinators came to be delegated to every province: to Chekiang, Honan, Shantung, Hukuang, Szechwan, Kiangsi, Shansi, and Shensi in the early 1430s; to Yünnan in 1444; to Kweichow in 1449; to Kwangtung intermittently until 1566, then regularly until 1570, when the position lapsed; to Kwangsi intermittently until 1569; and to Fukien in 1556. Others were delegated to other specially defined territories: in 1497 to the area of Nan-kan, the rugged terrain in which the three provinces Kwangtung, Kiangsi, and Hukuang, converged, far from any of the three provincial capitals; and, in 1597, during the struggle with the Japanese in Korea, to the area around Tientsin, the strategic coastal gateway to Peking. In addition, grand coordinators were assigned to the vital defense areas along the northern frontier: Kansu, Ning-hsia, Yen-sui, Hsüan-fu, and Liaotung in 1435–36, and to two zones immediately northwest and northeast of Peking later in the fifteenth century. In the seventeenth century, when the Manchus began to press on the Ming dynasty's northern frontier, the number of grand coordinators increased bewilderingly.

After 1453 they were regularly given nominal concurrent appointments as vice censors-in-chief (*fu tu yü-shih*) or assistant censors-in-chief (*ch'ien tu yü-shih*) in the Censorate "so as to facilitate their affairs." Thus endowed with both ministerial and censorial titles, they had sufficient prestige to be accepted as leaders by the regular provincial authorities. Despite his several titles, a grand coordinator was not considered a member of any particular government agency, nor did he have a prescribed staff of subordinate officials. He was considered a provincial-level surrogate of the emperor, who supervised and presided over those who actually administered the province. He usually had a close consultative relationship with the Censorate's regional inspector in his jurisdiction; his own nominal high status in the Censorate was actually a device to ensure his superiority *vis-à-vis* this regional inspector.

A similar ad hoc position of supreme commander (*tsung-tu*), sometimes translated as viceroy, eventually evolved out of the grand coordinator system. The supreme commander was a civil service coordinator on an even larger scale, delegated on a temporary basis to deal with a particular military problem affecting the jurisdictions of more than one grand coordinator. In 1430, one vice minister, and, in 1451, one vice censor-in-chief were designated supreme commanders to supervise the collection and transport of grain taxes from the Yangtze valley to Peking. This designation became a continuing commission, subsuming a concurrent grand coordinatorship in the Huai-an area of the Huai basin. At times, thereafter, supreme comman-

ders were commissioned for other kinds of nonmilitary supervision – for example, to direct water-control construction work along the Yellow River. But the institution was essentially a military one that began in 1441 with a delegation of a minister of war as supreme commander of military affairs to cope with a rebellion in Yünnan. From the late fifteenth century on, supreme commanders were delegated with increasing frequency. Although some became more or less permanent fixtures of the government like the grand coordinators, most had short-term appointments. Their territorial jurisdictions were sometimes so extensive as to include five provinces. An official was once thus delegated to be supreme commander of Kiangsi, Chekiang, Fukien, Hu-kuang, and the Southern Metropolitan Area; another once supervised Shensi, Shansi, Honan, Hu-kuang, and Szechwan simultaneously. Frequently, a supreme commander was concurrently grand coordinator of one of the provinces or other territories under his supervisory jurisdiction.¹¹⁸

As in the case of grand coordinators, supreme commanders had substantive appointments in regular administrative agencies at the capital. Usually, they were nominally ministers of war and concurrent censors-in-chief. The full designation of a supreme commander might be a very complex one: for example, minister of war and concurrently censor-in-chief, supreme commander of military affairs in Kwangtung and Kwangsi, concurrently controlling military rations, additionally in charge of salt regulations, concurrently grand coordinator of Kwangtung. During the last two decades of the dynasty supreme commanders proliferated remarkably.

Once all these sorts of coordinating offices evolved, provincial government was dominated by a grand coordinator, the military problems of multiprovincial areas were overseen by supreme commanders, and the central government was dominated by grand secretaries. All, though nominally ad hoc assignees outside the regular governmental structure, were, in fact, the chief executives and decision-makers at all levels of government.

The hierarchy of the general administration

The personal staff of Ming emperors consisted in large part of eunuch attendants. In theory, however, the emperor's highest-level counselors of state were dignitaries known collectively as the three dukes (*san kung*) and three solitaries (*san ku*). Their traditional titles were grand preceptor (*t'ai-shih*), grand

¹¹⁸ A complete list of supreme commander positions is given in *MS*, 73, pp. 1773–5. Cf. *TMHT*, 209, pp. 4155–65.

mentor (*t'ai-fu*), grand guardian (*t'ai-pao*), junior preceptor (*shao-shih*), junior mentor (*shao-fu*), and junior guardian (*shao-pao*). A second tier of such dignitaries was associated with the heir apparent: they included the grand preceptor of the heir apparent (*t'ai-tzu t'ai-shih*), and so on; thirteenth at the end of the list was the adviser to the heir apparent (*t'ai-tzu pin-k'o*). All these were considered regular substantive appointments, carrying ranks from 1a to 3a; but, in fact, the titles were used solely as honorific supplementary designations conferring extra prestige and compensation on such functioning appointees as grand secretaries.

After the first decade of the dynasty, when grand councilors (*ch'eng-hsiang*, *hsiang-kuo*, or *tsai-hsiang*), rank 1a, presided over a metropolitan Secretariat (*chung-shu sheng*) as more or less de facto prime ministers, Ming emperors gradually came to deal with the officialdom at large through a less formal body. The grand secretariat (*nei-ko*), and its contingent of grand secretaries (*ta hsiieh-shih*) gradually became what might be thought of as a collective of chiefs of staff for the emperor. As the grand secretariat became an ever more substantive institution, it gathered into its organization groups of clerical aides known collectively as drafters (*chung-shu she-jen*), all of rank 7b.¹¹⁹ Those most directly under the control of the grand secretaries were organized in two sections (*fang*) named after the types of documents with which they dealt (*kao-ch'ih fang* and *chih-ch'ih fang*). Others, who worked with the grand secretaries in a Central Drafting Office (*chung-shu k'o*), were technically members of the Hanlin Academy. Still others, considered more directly under the emperor's personal control, were organized in an East Section (*tung-fang*) serving in the Hall of Literary Culture (*wen-hua tien*) and a West Section (*hsi-fang*) serving in the Hall of Military Glory (*wu-ying tien*). The latter group eventually became a palace publishing establishment whose palace editions of imperially sponsored works are renowned examples of the printer's art.

Another agency that was a relatively autonomous part of the emperor's staff was the Seals Office (*shang-pao ssu*), headed by a Chief Minister (*ch'ing*), rank 5a. This agency collaborated closely with a parallel eunuch agency in maintaining, issuing, and supervising all uses of the numerous great state seals that were treasured as symbols of imperial authority, and without which no imperial order was valid.¹²⁰

Under the supervision of the Secretariat's executive officials until 1380, and subsequently, under the looser coordination of the grand secretariat, routine nonmilitary business of the Ming government was managed primarily by

119 MS, 73, pp. 1780-81. 120 MS, 74, pp. 1803-05.

the six ministries at the central government level, by provincial administration commissions at the provincial level, and by prefectures, subprefectures, and counties at regional and local levels.

The six ministries were the Ministries of Personnel (*li-pu*), of Revenue (*hu-pu*), of Rites (*li-pu*), of War (*ping-pu*), of Justice (*hsing-pu*), and of Works (*kung-pu*). Each was headed by a minister (*shang-shu*, rank 3a until 1380, then 2a) aided by a vice minister (*shih-lang*), rank 3a. The detailed work of the ministries was carried on by either four or thirteen constituent bureaus (*ch'ing-li ssu*), each staffed by one or more directors (*lang-chung*), rank 5a, vice directors (*yiiian-wai lang*), rank 5b, and secretaries (*chu-shih*), rank 6a. For internal administration, each ministry had a General Services Office (*ssu-wu t'ing*) headed by two office managers (*ssu-wu*), rank 9b; and the Ministries of Revenue and Justice, in addition, each had a Records Office (*chao-mo so*) staffed by record keepers (*chao-mo*), rank 8a, and proofreaders (*chien-chiao*), rank 9a. Each ministry also had a clerical staff of sub-official functionaries varying from 43 (Personnel) to 187 (Justice).¹²¹ Some ministries directly controlled separate but subordinate agencies, and some also supervised related but not directly subordinate agencies.

The Ministry of Personnel was in general charge of the appointments, merit ratings, promotions, demotions, leaves, retirements, and honors of all civil officials and sub-official functionaries.¹²² These responsibilities were divided among four Bureaus: of Appointments (*wen-hsüan ch'ing-li ssu*), of Honors (*yen-feng ch'ing-li ssu*), of Records (*chi-hsün ch'ing-li ssu*), and of Evaluations (*k'ao-kung ch'ing-li ssu*). So important were personnel procedures that the minister of personnel was generally recognized as the doyen of the various ministers.

The Ministry of Revenue was responsible for the census of population and of cultivated lands, the assessment and collection of taxes, and the handling of government revenues.¹²³ Within this ministry responsibilities were delegated, not on the basis of functional specializations, as in the Ministry of Personnel, but on the basis of territorial jurisdictions. There were thirteen bureaus, each bearing the name of one province [*Ssu-ch'uan* (Szechwan) *ch'ing-li ssu*, for example], which carried on all ministry business related to that province. Prescribed segments of the metropolitan areas around Peking and Nanking were assigned arbitrarily to various bureaus, in addition to their regular provincial jurisdictions. Within each bureau, however, there was a functional differentiation of responsibilities among four sections: a Statistics Section (*min-k'o*), a General Accounts Section (*tu-chih k'o*), a Special

¹²¹ For authorized staffs of subofficial functionaries, see *TMHT*, 7.

¹²² *MS*, 72, pp. 1734-39. ¹²³ *MS*, 72, pp. 1739-45.

Accounts Section (*chin-k'ò*), and a Granaries Section (*ts'ang-k'ò*). The state fiscal administration, dominated by the Ministry of Revenue, is discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume.¹²⁴

Directly subordinate to the Ministry of Revenue were a Supervisorate of Paper Money (*pao-ch'ao t'i-chü ssu*), a Currency Supply Service (*ch'ao-chih chü*), a Plate Engraving Service (*yin-ch'ao chü*), and many granaries (*ts'ang*) and storehouses (*k'u*). Also directly attached to the ministry were twelve domestic Customs Houses (*ch'ao-kuan*), which collected transit fees on all private shipping that utilized the Grand Canal. These fees provided the central government one category of revenues that did not pass through the hands of provincial authorities.

The Ministry of Rites was concerned with state ceremonies, rituals, and sacrifices; administration of the civil service recruitment examinations; and the reception of envoys from tributary states.¹²⁵ Like the Ministry of Personnel, it had four functionally differentiated bureaus: a Bureau of Ceremonies (*i-chih ch'ing-li ssu*), of Sacrifices (*tz'u-chi ch'ing-li ssu*), of Receptions (*chu-k'ò ch'ing-li ssu*), and of Provisions (*ching-shan ch'ing-li ssu*). Directly subordinate to the ministry were a Messenger Office (*hsing-jen ssu*), a Seals Service (*chu-yin ch*), and a Music Office (*chiaao-fang ssu*).

Closely related and indirectly subordinate to the Ministry of Rites were several service and ceremonial agencies. One of the most important of these was the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (*t'ai-ch'ang ssu*), in general charge of sacrificial rites and music, under a chief minister (*ch'ing*), rank 3a.¹²⁶ Directly subordinate to the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, in turn, were a Translators Institute (*ssu-i kuan*), which dealt with communications to and from tributary states, and an Imperial Music Office (*shen-yüeh kuan*).¹²⁷

Two other large, specialized agencies were also under the supervision of the Ministry of Rites: the Court of Imperial Entertainments (*kuang-lu ssu*), which provided and served the delicacies and drinks required for sacrifices, ceremonial banquets, and similar events; and the Court of State Ceremonial (*hung-lu ssu*), which was responsible for the ritual aspects of all state functions. Each was directed by a chief minister (*ch'ing*), rank 3b and 4a, respectively.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ See chapter 2.

¹²⁵ *MS*, 72, pp. 1743–50. Ming foreign relations are discussed in detail in chapters 4–7 of this volume.

¹²⁶ *MS*, 74, pp. 1795–98.

¹²⁷ *MS*, 74, pp. 1797–98, 1817–18; Lu Wei-chi, *Ssu i kuan tse li* (ca. 1613; rpt. Kyoto, 1928); Norman Wild, "Materials for the Study of the Ssu I Kuan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London University, No. 11 (1943–46), pp. 617–40; and Paul Pelliot, "Le Sseu-yi-kouan et le Houei-t'ong-kouan," *T'oung Pao*, Vol. 38 (1948), pp. 207–90. Until 1496, the Translators Institute was directly controlled by the Hanlin Academy.

¹²⁸ *MS*, 74, pp. 1799–1800, 1802–03.

The Ministry of Rites was also responsible for the regulation of the Buddhist and Taoist priesthoods, through a Central Buddhist Registry (*seng-lu ssu*) and a Central Taoist Registry (*tao-lu ssu*) in the capital. The state recognized and assigned to these two agencies two Buddhist Patriarchs (*shan-shih*) and two Taoist Patriarchs (*cheng-i*), giving them nominal 6a civil service rank without stipends. The registries were required to see that all Buddhist and Taoist priests in the empire were regularly examined and certified.¹²⁹

The Ministry of War was responsible for military administration in general – the appointments, promotions, and demotions of military personnel; the maintenance of military installations, equipment, and weapons; the operation of the empire's postal system; strategic planning; and all other military matters that were not in the nature of active training or direct field command. It had four functionally differentiated bureaus: a Bureau of Military Appointments (*wu-hsan ch'ing-li ssu*), of Operations (*chih-fang ch'ing-li ssu*), of Equipment and Communications (*ch'e-chia ch'ing-li ssu*), and of Provisions (*wu-ke'u ch'ing-li ssu*).¹³⁰ Directly subordinate to the ministry was an Interpreters Institute (*hui-t'ung kuan*), which was actually a state hostelry for envoys from tributary states.¹³¹ Under the ministry's indirect supervision was a Court of the Imperial Stud (*t'ai-p'u ssu*) that directed a number of horse pasturages throughout the empire and had branches (*hsing t'ai-p'u ssu*) in Shansi and Shensi, and in the frontier areas of Kansu and Liaotung.¹³² Also under the supervision of the ministry were four Pasturage Offices (*yüan-ma ssu*) – one in the Northern Metropolitan Area, one in Liaotung, and two in Kansu – with functions comparable to, and perhaps overlapping, those of the Branch Courts of the Imperial Stud.¹³³

The Ministry of Justice supervised judicial and penal processes.¹³⁴ Until 1390 it was divided into four functionally differentiated bureaus, but thereafter it was organized on the pattern of the Ministry of Revenue, with thirteen bureaus, one for each province. It worked closely with, but had no jurisdiction over, the Censorate and the Court of Judicial Review.

The Ministry of Works was in charge of government construction projects, the conscription of artisans and laborers for periodic labor service, the manufacture of government equipment, the maintenance of waterways and roads, the standardization of weights and measures, and the exploitation of mountains, lakes, rivers, marshes, and other areas considered to be public lands

129 *MS*, 74, pp. 1817–18.

130 *MS*, 72, pp. 1750–54.

131 Paul Pelliot, "Le Sseu-yi-kouan et le Houei-t'ong-kouan."

132 *MS*, 74, pp. 1800–02; 75, pp. 1845. 133 *MS*, 75, pp. 1845–46.

134 *MS*, 72, pp. 1755–59. On the Ming legal system, see chapter 3 of this volume.

and resources.¹³⁵ It had four bureaus: a Bureau of Construction (*ying-shan ch'ing-li ssu*), of Forestry and Crafts (*yü-heng ch'ing-li ssu*), of Irrigation and Transportation (*tu-shui ch'ing-li ssu*), and a State Farms Bureau (*t'un-t'ien ch'ing-li ssu*). In addition, it had a large variety of subsidiary warehouses, supply agencies, and factories (for textiles, metalwork, leatherwork, saddlery, paints, and the like), a Metropolitan Coinage Service (*pao-yüan chü*), and numerous Offices of Produce Levies (*ch'ou-fen chü*) scattered throughout the empire. The Offices of Produce Levies, which were originally attached to the Ministry of Revenues but which were transferred in 1471 to the Ministry of Works, levied a tax, normally in kind, on all forest products, which contributed toward the shipbuilding needs of the ministry.

These functioning administrative agencies in the central government were complemented by several autonomous service agencies. One of the most important of these was the Hanlin Academy (*han-lin yüan*), under a chancellor (*hsüeh-shih*), rank 5a, which provided literary, editorial, and scholarly assistance of all kinds to the emperor and the court.¹³⁶ Its personnel drafted and polished the more ceremonial sorts of proclamations and other state documents, compiled imperially sponsored histories and other works, read and explained the classics and histories to the emperor, and participated in state ceremonies and to some extent in governmental deliberations. Its personnel included academician readers-in-waiting (*shih-tu hsüeh-shih*), academician expositors-in-waiting (*shih-chiang hsüeh-shih*), erudites of the Five Classics (*wu-ching po-shih*), and a special group of historiographers (*shih-kuan*). As has been seen, the top three metropolitan graduates in the civil service recruitment examinations were normally appointed as historiographers in the Hanlin Academy, where they began to be groomed for future service in the grand secretariat, and other new metropolitan graduates were often assigned as observers (*kuan-cheng*) with the title of Hanlin bachelors (*shu chi-shih*).

Service agencies also included a Directorate of Astronomy (*ch'in-t'ien chien*), which conducted astronomical observations, issued weather forecasts, interpreted irregular natural phenomena, and fixed the annual calendar; a Directorate of Imperial Parks (*shang-lin yüan chien*), in control of parks, gardens, and the imperial menagerie in the capital; and an Imperial Academy of Medicine (*t'ai-i yüan*).¹³⁷

The Directorate of Education (*kuo-tzu chien*), which previously has been referred to repeatedly in connection with recruitment, established educational policy for all state-supported schools and, in addition, was itself a functioning center of instruction and study with a schedule of regular examinations for

135 MS, 72, pp. 1759-63.

136 MS, 73, pp. 1785-89.

137 MS, 74, pp. 1810-14.

its students (*chien-sheng*). Its head was a chancellor (*chi-chiu*), rank 4b. He was assisted by a director of studies (*ssu-yeh*), rank 6a. There were a Disciplinary Office (*sheng-ch'ien t'ing*), an Office of Erudites (*po-shih t'ing*), and six colleges (*t'ang*) with a total of thirty-two instructors (*chu-chiao*), rank 8b, instructors second-class (*hsüeh-cheng*), rank 9a, and instructors third-class (*hsüeh-lu*), rank 9b. The Directorate was commonly known as the National University (*t'ai-hsüeh*).¹³⁸

All these central government agencies, except the grand secretariat and the Central Drafting Office associated with it, had skeletal duplicates at the auxiliary capital, Nanking, after 1420; these had some administrative functions pertaining to the Southern Metropolitan Area.

General administration at the provincial level was originally the responsibility of branch secretariats (*hsing chung-shu sheng*) in each province. These were organized on the pattern of the metropolitan Secretariat except that they had no grand councilors. Rather, each branch secretariat was headed by a manager of governmental affairs (*p'ing-chang cheng-shih*), rank 1b. The branch secretariats were replaced in 1376 with provincial administration commissions (*ch'eng-hsüan pu-cheng ssu*, commonly abbreviated to *pu-cheng ssu*), each headed by two administration commissioners (*pu-cheng shih*), rank 2b. The nomenclature was intended to suggest, even more clearly than branch secretariats, that these were agencies set up on an ad hoc basis by the central government; but in fact the new commissions became quite permanent. The staff included a variable number of administration vice commissioners (*ts'an-cheng*), rank 3b, and assistant administration commissioners (*ts'an-i*), rank 3b; a registry (*ching-li ssu*) with a registrar (*ching-li*), rank 6b, and an office manager (*tu-shih*), rank 7b; a Records Office (*chao-mo so*) with a record keeper (*chao-mo*), rank 8b, and a proofreader (*chien-chiao*), rank 9a; an Office of the Judicial Secretary (*li-wen so*) headed by a judicial secretary (*li-wen*), rank 6b, a Prison (*ssu-yü ssu*) headed by a warder (*ssu-yü*), rank 9b; a storehouse (*ke'u*), a granary (*t'ang*), and a service agency (*chü*) for building maintenance, each under a commissioner-in-chief (*ta-shih*), rank 9b; and variable numbers of subofficial functionaries.

Eventually under the supervision of grand coordinators (*hsün-fu*) and supreme commanders (*tsung-tu*), and always under the watchful eye of a regional inspector detached from the metropolitan Censorate, the provincial administration commission¹³⁹ was in charge of general civil administration in its province. It was responsible for the census of population and lands, tax assessments and collections, disbursements, personnel evaluations, ceremonial observances, construction, water control, the flow of correspondence

¹³⁸ *MS*, 73, pp. 1789–91. ¹³⁹ *MS*, 75, pp. 1840–42.

between the central government and local agencies, and so on. To facilitate its coordinating role between the central government and the local agencies, its clerical staff was grouped into six sections (*ts'ao*) named after the six ministries, each handling matters relevant to the appropriate ministry. (Clerical staffs down to the county level were similarly organized.) For detailed supervision of the activities of lesser administrative units, the provincial administration commissions delegated some of their authority to branch offices (*fen-ssu*), each with an administration vice commissioner or an assistant administration commissioner in charge. The jurisdiction of each branch office was called a circuit (*tao*), and the man in charge was referred to as a circuit intendant (*tao-t'ai*). There were many different kinds of circuits, varying from province to province. Some had territorial jurisdictions; that is, they exercised all the powers of the provincial administration commission within limited geographical areas. Others had functional jurisdictions; that is, the geographical spheres of their authority were unlimited, coterminous with the province itself, but their authority was limited to specific functions. Inasmuch as the metropolitan areas surrounding Peking and Nanking lacked provincial administration commissions, those in the adjacent provinces, through branch offices, shared among them the provincial-level supervision of the metropolitan areas.

Each province included from three to eight general administration circuits (*fen-shou tao*), each designated by the name of the geographical area to which its authority was limited. Thus, for example, the Kiangsi commission had a Nan-jui circuit with headquarters at the provincial capital, Nan-ch'ang, in north central Kiangsi; a Hu-tung Circuit with headquarters at Kuang-hsin in northeast Kiangsi; a Hu-hsi Circuit with headquarters at Lin-chiang in west central Kiangsi; a Jao-nan Chiu-chang Circuit at Chiu-chang at the north central edge of Kiangsi; and a Kan-nan Circuit with headquarters at Nan-an in far southwestern Kiangsi. These offices were responsible for the close general supervision of the prefectures in their areas.

As for circuits with functional jurisdictions, each province had a tax intendant circuit (*tu-liang tao*), and some had census intendant circuits (*tu-ts'e tao*). With great variations from province to province and from time to time, there were also circuit intendants who supervised postal services, irrigation, grain storage, state farms, and other special government interests.

The commissioners, vice commissioners, and assistant commissioners of the provincial administration commissions shared with their high-ranking counterparts in the regional military commissions and the provincial surveillance commissions the collective designation regional supervisors (*fang-mien*); and shared with their counterparts in the provincial surveillance com-

missions alone the additional collective designation provincial intendants (*chien-ssu*).

Below the provincial level, descending the general administration hierarchy, came prefectures (*fu*), subprefectures (*chou*), and counties (*hsien*). The populace made direct contact with the government at the county level. The subprefecture, which had direct control over the county forming its seat and coordinating control over several other counties, and the prefecture, with jurisdiction over several prefectures (and usually over independent counties as well), were largely supervisory in function.¹⁴⁰ Officials of all these local agencies, especially counties, were collectively referred to as “the local authorities” (*yu-ssu*).

The prefecture was administered by a prefect (*chih-fu*), rank 4a, with the aid of variable numbers of vice prefects (*t'ung-chih*), rank 5a, and assistant prefects (*t'ung-p'an*), rank 6a, and a judge (*t'ui-kuan*), rank 7a. The prefect was in general charge of all administrative affairs in his territory, but took action on important matters only with the consent of the provincial authorities.

The prefectures at Peking (Shun-t'ien fu) and at Nanking (Ying-t'ien fu) were distinguished with special nomenclature. Each had one prefectural governor (*fu-yin*), rank 3a, one vice governor (*fu-ch'eng*), rank 4a, one vice prefect (*chih-chung*), rank 5a, from three to six assistant prefects (*t'ung-p'an*), rank 6a, and one judge (*t'ui-kuan*), rank 6b. Each of the capital cities was divided, for police purposes, into five wards (*ch'eng*), and each of these had a Warden's Office (*ping-ma chih-hui ssu*) responsible for providing police patrols and fire watchers.¹⁴¹

The sub-prefecture was normally an intermediary supervisory agency between the prefecture and its counties. Each had a subprefectural magistrate (*chih-chou*), rank 5b, and variable numbers of vice magistrates (*t'ung-chin*), rank 6b, and assistant magistrates (*p'an-kuan*), rank 7b.¹⁴²

The county, the basic unit of administration, was staffed by one county magistrate (*chih-hsien*), rank 7a, one vice magistrate (*hsien-ch'eng*), rank 8a, and one assistant magistrate (*chu-pu*), rank 9a. The county magistrate and his staff were charged with assessing and collecting local taxes, providing residents for state-requisitioned labor services, supervising care of the aged and indigent, performing state-sanctioned sacrifices and other ceremonies, keeping the peace, and administering justice. County magistrates were popularly known as “father-and-mother officials” (*fu-mu kuan*), a term reflecting the

140 *MS*, 75, pp. 1849–52.

141 *MS*, 74, pp. 1814–16; 75, pp. 1832–35. The Warden's Offices were under the special supervisory control of the Ministry of War at Peking and the Ministry of War at Nanking, and were also subject to inspection by special delegates from the Censorate.

142 *MS*, 75, p. 1850.

unlimited extent of their authority and also the benevolence that was expected to characterize their contacts with the populace.¹⁴³

Coexisting with this hierarchy of what might be called "line" administrative agencies were many other agencies with highly specialized administrative or service functions. These included the Branch Courts of the Imperial Stud and the Pasturage Offices supervised by the Ministry of War, the domestic Customs Houses supervised by the Ministry of Revenue, and the Offices of Produce Levies supervised by the Ministry of Works. In addition, there were six Salt Distribution Commissions (*tu chuan-yün-yen shih-ssu*) with a total of fourteen branches (*fen-ssu*), seven Salt Distribution Supervisorates (*yen-ke'o t'i-chü ssu*), four Horse Trading Offices (*ch'a-ma ssu*) in the far west, which traded tea to tribes beyond the borders in exchange for horses, and thirteen Iron Smelting Offices (*t'ieh-yeh so*). Three Maritime Trade Supervisorates (*shih-po t'i-chü ssu*), which controlled tributary trade with overseas nations and came under the control of eunuchs delegated from the imperial palace early in the dynasty, were located at Ch'üan-chou in Fukien, Ming-chou (Ningpo) in Chekiang, and Kuang-chou (Canton) in Kwangtung.¹⁴⁴

At the local level there were swarms of small, specialized agencies over which county magistrates had some supervisory authority. These included Police Offices (*hsiün-chien ssu*), Postal Relay Stations (*i*), Transport Offices (*ti-yün so*), Commercial Tax Offices (called *hsiün-ke'o ssu* and other names, often with branches), Fishing Tax Offices (*Ho-p'o ssu*), Tea and Salt Control Stations (*p'i-yen so*), granaries (*ts'ang*), storehouses (*ke'u*), and manufactories (*tsao-chü*).¹⁴⁵

In all local units there were also agencies that were subject to the central registries at the capital which supervised the local Buddhist and Taoist priest-hoods. These were the Prefectural Buddhist Registries (*seng-kang ssu*), Sub-prefectural Buddhist Registries (*seng-cheng ssu*), County Buddhist Registries (*seng-hui ssu*), Prefectural Taoist Registries (*tao-chi ssu*), Sub-prefectural Taoist Registries (*tao-cheng ssu*), and County Taoist Registries (*tao-hui ssu*).¹⁴⁶

In all local units there were three types of schools: medical schools (*i-hsiieh*), yin-yang schools (*yin-yang hsiieh*) for training in geomancy, and Confucian schools (*ju-hsiieh*).¹⁴⁷ Only the Confucian Schools were of significance in government, and they alone were subsidized by the state. There was one Confucian school at each prefectural seat, at each sub-prefectural seat, and at each

¹⁴³ *MS*, 75, pp. 1850–51. Cf. John R. Watt, *The district magistrate in late imperial China* (New York, 1972), which, although it emphasizes the Ch'ing dynasty, includes much data about the situation of district magistrates in Ming times.

¹⁴⁴ For somewhat more detailed information about these agencies see Hucker, "Governmental organization of the Ming dynasty," pp. 1–66, particularly p. 46. Cf. *MS*, 75, *passim*.

¹⁴⁵ *MS*, 75, pp. 1852–53. ¹⁴⁶ *MS*, 75, p. 1853.

¹⁴⁷ *MS*, 75, pp. 1851–53.

county seat. In each school there was one instructor (*chiao-shou* in the prefecture, *hsüeh-cheng* in the sub-prefecture, and *chiao-yü* in the county) and from two to four assistant instructors (*hsün-tao*).

Below the county level, the imperial government had contacts with the majority of the people, rural and urban, through organizations called communities (*li*), which were held responsible for maintaining local order, adjudicating local disputes, fostering morality and religion, establishing and maintaining such essential communal services as irrigation and elementary schooling, and for carrying out the laws in general. The theoretical ideal was that 110 neighboring households should be designated a community and the ten most prosperous households in it should provide a community head (*li-chang*) in rotation once each decade. The other hundred households were divided into ten tithings (*chia*), in each of which, one household was designated to provide a tithing head (*chia-shou*) who represented his group of families to the community head. During the middle years of the Ming dynasty, some communities were redesignated security groups (*pao*), but the so-called *li-chia* and *pao-chia* systems of local organization worked in essentially the same ways.

One responsibility the community heads bore was to collect local land taxes. Into the sixteenth century, these were delivered, not to county officials, but to specially designated tax captains (*liang-chang*). A tax captain was selected from one of the prosperous households. He represented several communities in an area from which approximately 10,000 bushels of tax grain were due annually. It was the responsibility of the tax captain to deliver his 10,000 bushels annually to his county magistrate, or directly to the capital, or to specified state granaries that were scattered throughout the empire. As the population grew, as society became more diversified, and as the state fiscal system became more monetized, the burden on tax captains became too complex and heavy. In the sixteenth century they gradually disappeared from the local scene; hired agents of county magistrates were then relied on to collect taxes from community heads or directly from individual households. This violated the intention of the founding emperor, who wanted localities to govern themselves as far as possible and, at times, even forbade district magistrates to tour and inspect their jurisdictions.¹⁴⁸

The surveillance and judicial hierarchy

Several categories of surveillance agencies were independent of the basic administrative hierarchy of the central government and the provinces.

¹⁴⁸ *MS*, 78. Cf. Liang Fang-chung, *The single-whip method of taxation in China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), and John R. Watt, *The district magistrate in late imperial China*, pp. 116ff.

Added to these agencies, the central government included a special autonomous Court of Judicial Review.

Traditionally, surveillance functions involved both active and passive watchfulness over all civil and military activities by several kinds of officials generically called surveillance officials (*ch'a-kuan*). These officials were expected to take no more active a role in government than to recommend deserving personnel and, more important, to impeach personnel who failed in their duties, abused their authority, or were generally unsuitable for service. Complementing them were remonstrance officials (*chien-kuan*) of various sorts, who had the prescribed functions of watching over the conduct of the emperor and denouncing his errors. This division of functions was done away with by the Yüan dynasty, which concentrated both surveillance and remonstrance functions in its Censorate (*yü-shih t'ai*), traditionally the supreme surveillance organ. The Ming dynasty resurrected the traditional Bureau of Remonstrance (*chien-yüan*) for a brief period in the 1380s,¹⁴⁹ but, in general, perpetuated the Yüan system. In a strictly organizational sense, therefore, the Ming ruler, like the Yüan rulers, concentrated attention on the impeachment of unworthy officials while deemphasizing remonstrance directed at emperors, an approach which tended to contribute to the growth of imperial autocracy.¹⁵⁰

The top-level surveillance agency, paralleling the six ministries and the five Chief Military Commissions in the forefront of the central government, was the Censorate.¹⁵¹ At the beginning of the dynasty this institution bore a traditional name which literally means "pavilion of censors" (*yü-shih t'ai*) and included in its staff two censors-in-chief (*yü-shih ta-fu*), rank 1b, two vice censors-in-chief (*yü-shih chung-ch'eng*), rank 2a, and various other personnel with traditional titles including associate censors (*shih yü-shih*), secretarial censors (*chih-shu shih yü-shih*), palace censors (*tien-chung shih yü-shih*), and a group of investigating censors (*chien-ch'a yü-shih*) organized in a subsection called the investigation bureau (*ch'a-yüan*). There were no branch censorates (*hsing yü-shih t'ai*) of the Yüan type outside the capital.

Following the abolition of the Secretariat in 1380, the Censorate underwent a thorough reorganization but survived as the only top-level agency of the central government whose authority had not been permanently fragmented. It emerged with a new designation literally meaning "chief investigation (or surveillance) bureau" (*tu ch'a-yüan*). At its head were two censors-in-chief (*tu*

149 *MS*, 74, pp. 1805–07.

150 The most thorough study of both surveillance and remonstrance functions in Ming times is Hucker, *The censorial system of Ming China*.

151 *MS*, 73, pp. 1867–73.

yü-shih), rank 2a, assisted by two vice censors-in-chief (*fu tu yü-shih*), rank 3a, and four assistant censors-in-chief (*ch'ien tu yü-shih*), rank 4a. The headquarters staff included a Registry (*ching-li ssu*), a General Services Office (*ssu-wu t'ing*), a Records Office (*chao-mo so*), and a Prison (*ssu-yü ssu*). The Censorate's principal subordinates were 110 investigating censors (*chien-ch'a yü-shih*), rank 7a, who were organized in Circuits (*tao*) named after each of the provinces. Despite being named for provinces, the Circuits were not dispersed geographically about the empire; they were merely subsections of the Censorate, all based in the capital. Collectively, the Circuits were commonly known by the old term Investigation Bureau (*ch'a-yüan*).

Perhaps no other agency of the Ming government was expected to engage in activities as far-reaching as those prescribed for the Censorate. It was charged with keeping all personnel and operations of the governmental apparatus (whether the court, the civil hierarchy, or the military hierarchy) under surveillance, and with requesting, or directly instituting, preventive, corrective, and punitive measures when they seemed warranted. The various designations given the censors reflected the broad scope of censorial responsibilities. They were, perhaps, most commonly called "the ears and eyes of the emperor" (*t'ien-tzu erh-mu*), or the variant form, "ear-and-eye officials" (*erb-mu kuan*). The censors' combined function as remonstrators was suggested by the designation "straight pointers" (*chih-chih*). They and the supervising secretaries were called "speaking officials" or "critics" (*yen-kuan*), and "the avenues of criticism" (*yen-lu*). Censors and officials of the provincial surveillance commissions were known collectively as "guardians of the customs and fundamental laws" (*feng-hsien kuan* or simply *feng-hsien*). The term, "the three judicial offices" (*san fa-ssu*), used to refer to the Censorate, the Ministry of Justice, and the Court of Judicial Review, suggested their judicial functions.

Investigating censors carried out censorial surveillance over the vast governmental mechanism. Although normal career members of the civil service, and thus subject to merit evaluations by their Censorate supervisors, the investigating censors were, in large measure, independent agents, having direct access to the emperor and being primarily responsible to him. They received both regular and irregular commissions or duty assignments that entrusted to them specified functional or geographical jurisdictions. The most important of the censorial commissions was that of regional inspector (*hsün-an*). Regional inspectors were general field representatives of the Censorate, and, in an important sense, of the emperor. One was assigned to every province. In addition, there were two in the Northern Metropolitan Area, three in the Southern Metropolitan Area, and one in each of three northern frontier zones: Liaotung, Kansu, and Hsüan-Ta (that is, Hsüan-fu and Ta-

t'ung). Each regional inspector was assigned to an area for only one year, during which time, he was expected to visit every locality in his jurisdiction. He interviewed and checked the trial records of prisoners, inspected all agencies of local government, observed conditions among the people, freely interrogated officials and commoners alike, accepted complaints and petitions from the people, had access to all government records, and advised, admonished, or commended local authorities as he saw fit. He had the power to impeach anyone in a memorial sent directly to the throne, and he freely submitted to the throne proposals for new governmental policies or criticisms of existing ones. In minor matters, he could, on his own initiative, instruct local officials to undertake, cease, or modify particular activities and he was empowered to inflict bodily punishment on low-ranking officials and functionaries without awaiting trial or approval. He was consulted on all major policy matters by the regular provincial authorities, and he engaged in joint deliberations with the grand coordinator in his area. A regional inspector's prestige was enormous.

Other censorial commissions involved more limited functions. Local areas were regularly visited by troop-purifying (*ch'ing-li chün-wu* or simply *ch'ing-chün*) censors, who observed general conditions of military service and, in particular, investigated the processes of recruitment and the recovery of deserters. There were also record-checking (*shua-chüan*) censors, who exhaustively inspected the files in government agencies to see that business had been conducted properly and without delay; salt-control (*hsün-yen*) censors, who watched for evidence of salt smuggling and for maladministration of the state salt monopoly; and many others. When military campaigns were undertaken, censors were commissioned to keep watch over all aspects of military operations (*chien-chün*) and to submit independent reports of successes or failures to the throne. Quite irregularly, censors were also sent out into the provinces to supervise famine relief or rehabilitation after floods or locust infestations, to conduct special judicial investigations or trials, and for whatever other purposes emperors might wish to use them.

Investigating censors who were not touring on such commissions at a given moment worked in the circuit offices of the Censorate at the capital, routinely reviewing the records of judicial cases forwarded from provincial surveillance commissions and imposing an elaborate complex of audits and inspections on all governmental agencies in the capital. They participated in all court audiences and policy deliberations and took part in the personnel evaluation procedures of the Ministry of Personnel.

Supplementing the surveillance thus provided by the Censorate was surveillance of a more specialized kind provided by supervising secretaries (*chishih-chung*), rank 7b, who were organized in six cooperating, but mutually-

independent, Offices of Scrutiny (*k'o*) at the capital.¹⁵² In T'ang and Sung times, supervising secretaries had been members of the Chancellery (*men-hsia sheng*). The Yüan rulers had deprived supervising secretaries of censorial functions and made them imperial diarists. The Ming dynasty restored their censorial functions and, not having a Chancellery, gave them an autonomous place in the central government.

The six offices of scrutiny were paired with the six ministries in the governmental structure and, accordingly, were designated as the Office of Scrutiny for Personnel (*li-k'o*). They were not subordinate to, or in any organizational way affiliated with, the ministries. Neither were they organizationally affiliated with the Censorate. Not only were the six offices of scrutiny independent of all other agencies; each individually was an independent unit. The offices of scrutiny had no coordinating supervisors. Each office had one chief supervising secretary (*tu chi-shih-chung*), rank 7a, and each had a left and a right supervising secretary (*tso, yu chi-shih-chung*), rank 7b, in addition to ordinary supervising secretaries, whose number varied between four and eight.

Like investigating censors, supervising secretaries had low rank but great prestige and authority. Their influence derived in part from their participation in some surveillance functions, especially when they were sent by emperors on special investigatory missions. Their influence principally derived from their control over the flow of documents in the central government, and their exercise of a special veto power (*feng-po* or *k'o-ts'an*) over state documents. Each office of scrutiny was particularly responsible for overseeing the flow of documents to and from its corresponding ministry. All memorials submitted to the throne, through either the Office of Transmission or the eunuch-staffed palace secretariat (*wen-shu fang*), seem to have been available in duplicate for scrutiny by the supervising secretaries. When imperial orders in response to such memorials were issued from the palace, they were delivered to supervising secretaries designated in rotation as recipients of edicts. They, in turn, notified all appropriate ministries, which copied out edicts calling on them for action or for deliberation and response. The offices of scrutiny kept logs of the edicts transmitted to them, and set a deadline for each document before which a ministry had to report, or submit the results of its deliberations, as the situation demanded. At any point in this process, supervising secretaries had the right to intervene by vetoing a memorial, an edict, or a ministerial report, either because it was not in the prescribed form or on the basis that it was inappropriate or unwise in substance. Such vetoes meant that the originator had to reconsider his document. Yet, supervising

¹⁵² *MS*, 74, pp. 1805–07.

secretaries could not arbitrarily persist in overruling the considered judgment of a memorialist or the emperor. In some instances, supervising secretaries merely edited and rephrased those documents they considered unsuitable.

In addition to this most important function, supervising secretaries participated in court audiences and in many policy deliberations, submitted remonstrances against unwise acts or policies, and cooperated with the Censorate in a variety of ways. Their relationship with censors was so close that Ming documents repeatedly use the collective designation offices of scrutiny and circuits (*k'o-tao*).

Another agency that had surveillance, veto authority, and autonomous status in the central government was the Office of Transmission (*t'ung-cheng ssu*). This was headed by a transmission commissioner (*t'ung-cheng shih*), rank 3a, assisted by left and right vice commissioners (*tso, yu t'ung-cheng*), rank 4a, and a left and right assistant commissioner (*ts'an-i*), rank 5a. The office was served by a Registry (*ching-li ssu*) staffed by a registrar (*ching-li*), rank 7a, and an administrative clerk (*chih-shih*), rank 8a. The principal functions of the office were to accept memorials addressed to the throne, register digests of them, receive and take note of responses from the palace, and send them to the offices of scrutiny for notification of the appropriate ministries.

From its origin in 1370, until 1377, this office was named the *ch'a-yen ssu*, which can be roughly translated as the "office for the scrutiny of memorials," a name that suggests a clear relationship with the tradition of surveillance officials. From 1379, until perhaps as late as 1393, supervising secretaries were attached to this office's staff, and, even thereafter, this office was authorized, as were the supervising secretaries, to veto memorials. Especially in the early decades of the dynasty, before the grand secretariat developed and before the eunuch-staffed palace secretariat became important, the Office of Transmission was an influential agency. The transmission commissioner was referred to as "the throat and tongue" (*hou-she*) of the emperor. Although the office's prestige waned through the 1400s, the transmission commissioner was still considered one of the nine chief ministers (*chiu ch'ing*), a generic term for officials regularly summoned to court for deliberations on important matters; the group also included the heads of the ministries, the Censorate, and the Court of Judicial Review.¹⁵³

At the provincial level, in addition to regional inspectors and other delegates from the Censorate, surveillance was provided by Provincial Surveillance Commissions (*t'i-hsing an-ch'a ssu* or simply *an-ch'a ssu*).¹⁵⁴ These agencies were established in each province alongside the provincial adminis-

153 *MS*, 73, pp. 1780–81. 154 *MS*, 75, pp. 1843–45.

tration commission and the regional military commission. Comparable agencies in the Yüan governmental structure had been directly subordinate to the Censorate. This was not the case in Ming times, but there was a very close functional relationship – so close that the provincial surveillance commissions were commonly referred to collectively as “the outer Censorate” (*wai-t'ai*).

Each commission had a surveillance commissioner (*an-ch'a shih*), rank 3a, assisted by variable numbers of surveillance vice commissioners (*fu-shih*), rank 4a, and assistant surveillance commissioners (*ch'ien-shih*), rank 5a. The vice commissioners and assistant commissioners, like their counterparts in the provincial administration commissions, were in charge of branch offices (*fen-ssu*), each with a prescribed geographic or functional jurisdiction called a circuit (*tao*). In each province there were from three to nine general surveillance circuits (*fen-hsün tao*), from two to seven record checking circuits (*shua-chüan tao*), and from one to twelve military defense circuits (*ping-pei tao*) or coastal defense circuits (*hai-fang tao*), all designated according to their geographical locations. In addition, with few variations, each province had one education intendant circuit (*t'i-tu hsiieh tao*), one troop purification circuit (*ch'ing-chün tao*), and one postal service circuit (*i-ch'uan tao*). As in the case of the provincial administration commissions, the surveillance commissions of adjacent provinces had some branch offices with jurisdiction over segments of the metropolitan areas.

In general, the provincial surveillance commissions were required to maintain surveillance over all local government personnel, taking whatever disciplinary action was called for to uphold government morale and to relieve the people of bureaucratic corruption and oppression. In many ways their work duplicated or supported that of regional inspectors and other delegates from the Censorate at the capital, with whom they were expected to cooperate. In addition to exercising such censorial functions, they played a direct role in judicial administration. They supervised the handling of litigations by the local magistrates and served as courts of appeal. Moreover, whenever important affairs were to be dealt with, the surveillance commissioners joined with the administration commissioners and the military commissioners to form a kind of provincial deliberative council. With the institution of grand coordinators and supreme commanders and the ever-expanding activities of censors in local areas, it appears that the non-judicial functions of the surveillance commissions declined in importance and that their judicial functions gained in importance. But their censorial functions did not completely wither away. In particular, the military defense intendants, who were charged with censorial supervision of all local defense activities, steadily became more influ-

ential and eventually, late in the dynasty, became so numerous it was said that they “overflowed the empire.”¹⁵⁵

In most respects, the Ming governmental system did not give a special autonomous status to the judiciary. Every local magistrate was chief justice of his territory, and judicial matters were handled as merely one aspect of general administration. Most judicial sentences, however, had to be ratified by successive reviews at higher levels of the administrative hierarchy. The heavier the sentence, the higher the authority needed for ratification; death sentences required ratification by the emperor. Normal procedure called for trial records to be regularly sent to the local provincial administration commission for review, and then to the Ministry of Justice in the capital. But cases originating in the local military units took another route. They went through the regional military commissions to the chief military commissions at the capital. And cases originating in provincial surveillance commissions, or appealed to them, were sent for review to the Censorate.¹⁵⁶

Beyond this level of judicial review, there was an autonomous agency in the capital called the Court of Judicial Review (*ta-li ssu*), under a chief minister (*ch'ing*), rank 3a, which contained two courts of review (*ssu*), one of the left and one of the right. This provided a final check, short of imperial review, on the propriety of judicial findings and sentences.¹⁵⁷ Case records approved by the Ministry of Justice, the chief military commissions, and the Censorate were all submitted to the Court of Judicial Review. In all cases except those involving death sentences, the Court of Judicial Review was apparently empowered to issue a certificate of ratification, whereupon the case was referred back to the appropriate punitive authority, ordinarily the magistrate who originally handled the case. If the Court of Judicial Review found evidence of injustice, it was empowered to return a case forthwith to the original magistrate for retrial, or to transfer it to a different magistrate for retrial, or to request that it be referred to a deliberative assembly of capital officials, or in the last resort to request a decision by the emperor.

The Censorate, the offices of scrutiny, the Office of Transmission, and the Court of Judicial Review were all duplicated in skeletal form at Nanking after 1420, but appointments to such agencies at Nanking were mostly sinecures.

¹⁵⁵ *MS*, 73, p. 1845. The military defense circuits in existence in the late sixteenth century are listed in *TMHT*, 128.

¹⁵⁶ For detailed information on Ming judicial practices, see *MS*, 93–95, and *TMHT*, 160–79. Cf. chapter 3 of this volume, on Ming law.

¹⁵⁷ *MS*, 73, pp. 1781–83.

The military hierarchy

The Ming military system consisted of two organizational hierarchies, an administrative one and a tactical one. Both administrative and technical military establishments existed throughout the empire, but they were naturally concentrated in areas with the greatest military needs, in particular, along the seacoasts and the inland frontiers.

The administrative hierarchy

The basic military administration hierarchy culminated in the five chief military commissions (*wu-chün tu-tu fu*) in the central government,¹⁵⁸ paralleling the six ministries and the Censorate. Originally, as in the case of the Secretariat, there was a unitary Bureau of Military Affairs (*shu-mi yüan*). This was early transformed into a unitary Chief Military Commission (*ta tu-tu fu*), but that, in turn, was fragmented into five organs of equal rank in 1380, when the Secretariat superstructure was done away with.

Each of the chief military commissions was headed by unprescribed numbers of commissioners-in-chief (*tu-tu*), rank 1a, vice commissioners-in-chief (*tu-tu t'ung-chih*), rank 1b, and assistant commissioners-in-chief (*tu-tu ch'ien-shih*), rank 2a. The various levels of military commissioners-in-chief were all normally members of the nobility bearing the titles of duke, marquis, or earl. Collectively referred to as the five commissions (*wu-fu*), these organs had arbitrarily defined geographical jurisdictions (originally not even contiguous) within which they supervised the activities of all military units. They were concerned with the specialized "professional" aspects of military administration, whereas the Ministry of War dealt with problems of personnel, supply, and the like. In respect of field operations, the commissioners-in-chief controlled tactics, but the Ministry of War determined strategic policies and troop dispositions.

At the provincial level were regional military commissions (*tu chih-hui ssu* or simply *tu-ssu*),¹⁵⁹ each assigned for supervision to one or another of the chief military commissions at the capital. In all, there were sixteen such establishments from the fifteenth century on: one in each of the thirteen provinces and one in each of three vital areas along the northern frontier – in Liaotung, at Ta-ning in modern Jehol province, and at Wan-ch'üan in modern Inner Mongolia. Besides these, there were five branch regional military commissions (*hsing tu-ssu*), one each in Shensi, Shansi, Fukien, Szechwan, and Hukuang. Each commission or branch commission was directed by a regional commissioner (*tu chih-hui shih*), rank 2a, two vice commissioners (*tu chih-hui*

158 *MS*, 76, pp. 1856–58. 159 *MS*, 76, pp. 1872–73.

t'ung-chih), rank 2b, and four assistant commissioners (*tu chih-hui ch'ien-shih*), rank 3a.

On lower levels, the military administration hierarchy basically consisted of guards (*wei*), battalions (*ch'ien-hu so*), and companies (*po-hu so*), each designated by its geographical locality.

Each guard¹⁶⁰ was under the control of one guard commander (*chih-hui shih*), rank 3a, two vice commanders (*chih-hui t'ung-chih*), rank 3b, and four assistant commanders (*chih-hui ch'ien-shih*), rank 4a. Each guard also had two judges (*chen-fu*), rank 5b, and in each there was a military school (*wu-hsüeh*).

After 1374, at least in theory, each guard consisted of 5,600 soldiers divided equally among five battalions. Each battalion had a battalion commander (*ch'ien-hu*), rank 5a, two vice commanders (*fu-ch'ien-hu*), rank 5b, and two judges (*chen-fu*), rank 6b. The 1,120 soldiers theoretically comprising a battalion were further divided equally among ten companies, each having a company commander (*po-hu*), rank 6a. Each company's 112 soldiers included the equivalent of modern noncommissioned officers: two platoon commanders (*tsung-ch'i*) each directing five squad commanders (*hsiao-ch'i*), each of whom in turn controlled a squad of ten soldiers.¹⁶¹ There also were independent battalions (*shou-yü ch'ien-hu so*), organized on the standard pattern, that were controlled directly by the regional military commissions and did not belong to guards.

It is reported that there were, in all, 493 guards and 359 independent battalions in the empire in the early fifteenth century, but the numbers increased greatly in the latter years of the dynasty.¹⁶²

Within the territory organized into provinces and metropolitan areas, these units of military administration existed alongside the units of the civil administration hierarchy and did not have any independent territorial jurisdictions. Many guards and battalions were actually quartered inside the walls of prefectural and subprefectural cities or towns. But in the sparsely settled frontier regions of the empire, where there were few units of civil administration, territories were commonly organized and governed entirely under the resident military units.

Aside from these units scattered about the empire, there was an awesome assemblage of guards, all organized on the pattern just described, in the immediate vicinity of Peking. These were Capital Guards (*ching-wei*), 74 in all, of which 33 were further distinguished as Imperial Guards (*shang-chih wei* or *ch'in-chün wei*) and were charged with protection of the imperial palace.¹⁶³ Most important among these was the Imperial Bodyguard, literally called

160 MS, 76, pp. 1873. 161 MS, 76, pp. 1873-5.

162 MS, 90, p. 2204. 163 MS, 76, pp. 1860-64.

the “embroidered uniform guard” (*chin-i wei*). This guard cooperated with eunuchs of the Eastern Depot and Western Depot in secret service activities; its officers exercised almost unlimited police and judicial authority, and its prison (*chen-fu ssu*, commonly called *chao-yü*) was a feared torture chamber. Commissions in the Imperial Bodyguard also provided sinecures for various palace hangers-on and favorites, including court painters. None of the Imperial Guards was under the jurisdiction of the chief military commissions, and fifteen other Capital Guards were similarly independent, being under direct command of the emperor.

Nanking, the auxiliary capital after 1420, had another large concentration of Capital Guards, forty-nine in all, of which seventeen were designated Imperial Guards. All these were subordinate to the five auxiliary chief military commissions of Nanking. Actual military control at Nanking was vested in three specially designated dignitaries. One was the Grand Commandant (*shou-pei*), a title normally granted to a duke, marquis, or earl (but often to a eunuch instead), who was always appointed as a personal agent of the emperor. Associated with him was a vice commandant (*hsieh-t'ung shou-pei*), usually a marquis or earl. Third in the Nanking triumvirate was a grand adjutant (*ts'an-tsan chi-wu*), a title conferred regularly on the Nanking minister of war.¹⁶⁴

Special military arrangements were also made for the two other, “honorific” capitals of the Ming dynasty – Chung-tu, the ancestral home of the founding emperor, and Hsing-tu, the family home of the Chia-ching emperor (r. 1521–66). Each had a special regency (*liu-shou ssu*) to oversee the guard units assigned to the ancestral tombs of the imperial family in its area, independent of any regional military commission but under the supervision of one of the chief military commissions at Peking.¹⁶⁵

Other units in a special category were the Escort Guards (*hu-wei*) and the Ceremonial Guards (*i-wei*) that were part of the entourages of imperial princes. Although some training was accomplished in the local guard garrisons, tactical training was specially undertaken in three training divisions (*ying*) at Peking, one of which was charged with training in firearms. At times, the number of training divisions was increased to include integrated divisions (*p'uan-ying*) and other special organizations. Troops from guards throughout the empire were regularly rotated to the training divisions or to their counterparts at Nanking and served, while there, as a sort of combat-ready reserve. However, as we have seen, the training divisions system dete-

¹⁶⁴ *MS*, 76, p. 1864.

¹⁶⁵ *MS*, 76, pp. 1871–72.

riorated greatly in the late 1400s and, during the last half of the dynasty, such troops served mainly as construction gangs.¹⁶⁶

The tactical hierarchy

In the Ming system, there was no body of regular combat troops separate from the garrison forces of the guards, battalions, and companies. When campaigns were undertaken, high-ranking officers or nobles holding appointments in the chief military commissions were specially designated to lead them as generals (*chiang-chün*) or generals-in-chief (*ta chiang-chün*), and troops were transferred to the field commands out of appropriate local guards, or out of the training divisions at the capital. When a campaign ended, the general or general-in-chief surrendered his temporary tactical command, and the troops returned to their normal garrison duties.

There were also relatively permanent tactical commands, especially along the northern frontier, where constant defensive vigilance was required. There were walled places (*ch'eng*), forts (*pao*), stockades (*chai*), ports (*kang*), passes (*k'ou* or *kuan*), and other strategic locations that required permanent defense arrangements. Troops from nearby guard garrisons were detached in rotation to man such defense positions, where they were commanded by specially delegated officers.

Officers on campaigns, or in command of permanent defense positions, were on relatively temporary assignments; they held rank-titles or substantive appointments somewhere in the regular hierarchy of the military administration.¹⁶⁷ Those who directed tactical dispositions and operations in a large area were commonly called regional commanders (*tsung-ping kuan*) or grand defenders (*chen-shou*). Some were additionally entitled general. Officers who controlled smaller areas were called regional vice commanders (*fu tsung-ping kuan*) or assistant regional commanders (*ts'an-chiang*). Each regional commander also normally controlled a mobile corps commander (*yu-chi chiang-chün*). The titles of lesser tactical officers included commandant (*shou-pei*), supervisor (*t'i-tiao kuan*), and many others. During the early years of the dynasty, almost all major tactical commands were given to nobles or other high-ranking officers of the chief military commissions, but, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the number of tactical commands grew so large that such positions were regularly given to lower-ranking military officers. It was not uncommon for favored eunuchs to be so honored, and such commands were occasionally even given to civil officials. In any event, the general principle was that soldiers on tactical

¹⁶⁶ *MS*, 76, pp. 1858–60. ¹⁶⁷ *MS*, 76, pp. 1865–71 and ch. 91.

assignments were commanded by officers other than those who supervised them in their garrisons. At times, there were efforts to change this pattern, as, for example, when integrated divisions were created at Peking after the T'u-mu débâcle of 1449. These were troops that served under the same commanders whether in training or on campaign.

In the mature Ming system, almost every province had a regional commander to supervise the tactical use of soldiers who, in their garrisons, were under the supervision of regional military commissions. There were other regional commanders as well, most notably in charge of the nine defense areas along the Great Wall frontier. However, after the development of grand coordinators and supreme commanders in the fifteenth century, all tactical commanders in the military service generally came under the supervision of these high-ranking civil service dignitaries.

THE QUALITY OF MING GOVERNANCE

Many of the ways in which the Ming government actually operated have been suggested in the preceding parts of this chapter, and others are dealt with in following chapters on Ming law and fiscal administration. How the government reacted, or failed to react, to particular problems, crises, and challenges is also covered in detail in the narratives of Volume 7.

How effective government was at any time in China's imperial history is very difficult to assess. The most detailed evidence is almost always found in administrative regulations and other kinds of documents that reflect the interests of the ruling class and which principally show how government was supposed to work, rather than how it really worked. Most traditional histories, biographies, and other official or unofficial materials share the same bias. Fiction, a source from which one might hope to get glimpses of actuality, tends overwhelmingly to be written by cynical members or hangers-on of the same class. All these materials reveal ineptitude, corruption, and incredibly inefficient bureaucratism in Ming times. Fiction, in particular, portrays Ming government as a morass of arrogance, cupidity, hypocrisy, cowardice, and, at best, high-principled ineffectiveness.¹⁶⁸ However, the sources also reveal efforts to solve difficult problems in sensible ways, innumerable acts of dedication and martyrdom, and many innovative institutional arrangements.

¹⁶⁸ A good example of the fictional view of Ming government is one of China's most famous novels – *Chin P'ing Mei*, a tale of romance and rascality among the elite, heavily dosed with pornography, which was issued anonymously in the late sixteenth century. It is available in several English translations and is widely known by the English title *The Golden Lotus*.

From the first reign to the last, Ming officials readily complained to emperors about shortcomings in government and were frequently subject to furious reactions. The repeated general complaint in the middle and late Ming periods was that emperors or their agents were not adhering to the fundamental laws and ancestral instructions of the founding emperor. This was ironic in the extreme, for no other native ruler in China's imperial history was as contemptuous, distrustful, and cruel in his dealings with his officials – especially his civil officials – as the Hung-wu emperor. His monstrous purges of officials, most notably in the cases stemming from his disillusionment with grand councilor Hu Wei-yung and general Lan Yü, and his related rearrangements of the governmental structure, were calculated to intimidate, if not terrorize, all his servitors, and to establish his solitary grasp on the handles of governmental power, and, in addition, to prevent any subsequent changes that might threaten the autocratic power of his successors.

Most of the Hung-wu emperor's animosity toward officialdom he justified, not without reason, on the basis that civil officials mistreated the common people. He tirelessly lectured his officials, his nobles, and his close relatives on the principles of personal integrity and benevolent government found in the *Analects of Confucius*.¹⁶⁹ Yet, from the point of view of relations between the ruler and his ministers, he can only be judged to have reversed the dynastic cycle from "good first emperor" to "bad last emperor" by which Chinese have traditionally explained their political history. By almost any standard, he was a "bad first emperor" of the worst sort; and the shadow he cast over the rest of Ming history was probably the most baleful aspect of Ming governance.

As virtually all historians since the fall of the Ming dynasty have insisted, the eventual decline and collapse of the dynasty resulted from the Hung-wu emperor's abolition of the Secretariat's superstructure in 1380, coupled with his demand that his successors must promptly put to death anyone who dared propose re-establishing a grand councilorship or indeed anything resembling a prime ministership. After his time, rulers and officials alike were caught in a trap of his making: the government could work effectively only under a strong ruler. Since the abilities and inclinations of later Ming emperors inevitably fluctuated, it was left to others to wield imperial authority

169 It was in character, however, for the Hung-wu emperor to dislike Confucius's anti-authoritarian ancient follower, Mencius. He thought Mencius was disrespectful to rulers and said that if Mencius were still alive he would have to be punished severely. In 1394, he created a special board of scholars to edit Mencius's writings, deleting those passages that disparaged the position of rulers and those that urged ministers to remonstrate against rulers' errors. In all, eighty-five passages were struck out. The emasculated edition that resulted was printed and circulated for use in schools. See Wu Han, *Chu Yüan-chang chuan*, pp. 148–49.

when emperors were too young, too innocent, or too inattentive to do so. In the governmental system of the middle and late Ming periods, the only “others” who were positioned to act in this fashion were palace eunuchs or grand secretaries from the Hanlin Academy, and what might be called the constitutional measures and pronouncements of the founder forbade them to act in such fashion. A succession of dictatorial eunuchs, beginning with Wang Chen in the 1440s, and of dominating senior grand secretaries, beginning with Yang T’ing-ho in the early 1500s, all consequently provoked factional disputes that seriously disrupted governance. These disputes culminated in the Tung-lin and Wei Chung-hsien débâcles of the 1620s (see Volume 7, Chapters 9, and 10).¹⁷⁰

The only fair judgment, in the end, must take into account the historical fact that the Ming dynasty endured for more than two and a half centuries – busy times of population growth, urban growth, agrarian and mercantile expansion, monetization and inflation, and the influx of intriguing new things and ideas from early modern Europe. It survived domestic insurrections, an aborted attempt to incorporate Annam (Vietnam) into the empire, humiliations by coastal raiders from Japan, a costly war with the Japanese in Korea, and repeated incursions by the Mongols. The dynasty’s emperors may indeed have been brutal, tyrannical, capricious, inattentive, or just simpleminded and degenerate. (This was more often the case than not, to be sure.) Many aspects of their government may seem, in retrospect, unworkable or self-defeating. But the fact remains that the government served the dynasty’s and China’s interests by helping to preserve the state through a very long and troublesome period.

In short, the truth of the matter seems to be that most Ming emperors were less than admirable rulers and that Ming officials included both rascals and worthies in full measure. Many Ming Chinese may well have wished for more enlightened rulers and more uniformly effective officials. Still, for all its faults, when compared to contemporary governments in other major societies, the Ming government apparently put a light burden on ordinary Chinese. It can hardly be supposed that Ming Chinese could have envisioned a more satisfactory institutional system. Hence, considering how it maintained its power and sustained its subjects both morally and materially, the Ming government probably deserves to be reckoned, on balance, the most successful major government in the world in its time.

170 On the Tung-lin group and Wei Chung-hsien, see Mote and Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, pp. 532–50; 596–99.

CHAPTER 2

THE MING FISCAL ADMINISTRATION

INTRODUCTION

Many characteristic features of Ming fiscal administration trace their origins to the first Ming emperor's peculiar concept of government. In 1380, the office of the prime minister was abolished, never to be revived. Henceforth, the emperor acted as his own chief executive officer. After a series of bloody purges that lasted from 1376 to 1396, the bureaucracy was virtually reduced to a huge clerical pool, subservient to the sovereign but not empowered to make important decisions. The new system that the first emperor had created called for an omnipresent ruler who exercised personal control over a population officially reported at close to sixty million. The civil government functioned as not much more than a transmitter of imperial wishes.

The situation at the local level was the reverse of the situation at the top of the administrative hierarchy. Villages were organized into self-governing communities. The basis for these group associations was not civil law, but Confucian morality. With intra-community litigations settled by imperial adjudication and unruly persons punished by their own elders, local communities needed little official supervision. In fact, the first Ming emperor even refused to allow his governmental functionaries to enter rural areas. This organizational scheme reveals a curious amalgam of arbitrary, autocratic rules and idealistic notions. Such an administrative system was basically unsound. The success of its operation relied more on the ideological cohesion and administrative discipline that bound the governing as well as the governed than on official administrative procedures. The first Ming emperor, in fact, ran his administration by cowing his subjects with brutal and arbitrary punishments on the one hand and moral exhortations on the other.

Because this political structure was unprecedented in the history of imperial China, the financial establishment that supported it could not be designed on the basis of historical precedents. Despite certain superficial similarities to fiscal organizations of previous dynasties in Chinese history, the Ming fiscal system operated differently from its inception.

THE FORMATION OF THE MING FISCAL SYSTEM

The first emperor's credo: frugality and simplicity

The political order that the first Ming emperor established had no provisions for change. Creative solutions to administrative dilemmas were not even expected. The first Ming emperor used his despotic power to regulate his empire closely so that it retained its simple agrarian economy. Agricultural production was of paramount interest to the state; other economic activities were not taken seriously. Frugality was supposed to be practiced by everyone from the monarch down to his lowliest subject. This obsession with stringent economies, of course, affected the provisions for administrative overhead as well. The entire civil service employed less than 8,000 persons. All were paid minimal or nominal salaries. The fiscal structure was monolithic. No distinction was made between imperial revenue and local revenue. All provincial and local officials acted simultaneously as regional treasurers of the crown. Palace expenditures were not separated from state expenditures. All materials and goods that arrived at the capital were turned over to government warehouses within the palace compound which were under the supervision of the emperor. Despite the large palace staff, no specialized ministry in charge of the imperial household was ever established. The army maintained no logistical support organizations independent of the civil government.

Taxes were low. Land was taxed at about 3 percent of the total yield. Almost all the tax proceeds were collected in kind. Delivery of these commodities was, by and large, performed by the general population. To avoid establishing service facilities, such deliveries were always made to the lowest administrative level possible. State incomes and expenditures were then matched item by item and cancelled by delivering the income from one place to meet the expenditures of another. The creation of intermediate depots and distribution centers was avoided. This practice resulted in numerous short supply lines criss-crossing the empire; tax revenue was disbursed before it was consolidated. The Ministry of Revenue functioned more as a general accounting office than as an operating agency. When the bookkeeping grew to a fantastic scale, a reorganization of the government's supply logistics became a matter of necessity.

Consistent with his sense of good government, the first Ming emperor avoided involvement in foreign wars. The army was ordered to produce at least a part of its own food through military farming. The government also defrayed many expenditures with paper currency. Thus, during the first emperor's reign, the imperial granaries always had a surplus, despite his rather low level of taxation. In 1385, he had already ordered that stone tablets, on

which the regional tax quotas were inscribed, be erected within the Ministry of Revenue's office compound. The underlying thought was that a budgetary ceiling that applied to all echelons of the government and all territorial units could be indefinitely maintained. On several occasions, the emperor warned his officials that anyone who dared to suggest that state revenues should be increased would be treated as a public enemy.

Ch'eng-tsu: expansion without organization

After Ch'eng-tsu usurped the throne in 1402, he found T'ai-tsu's fiscal structure unsuitable for his purposes. Austerity had never been one of his concerns. The invasion of Annam, and the repeated expeditions to the Mongolian steppe, required vast amounts of military supplies. The construction of the Grand Canal and the palace complex in Peking, along with Cheng Ho's voyages, called for additional materials and manpower. The fragmented system of revenue allocation put in place by the first emperor could not keep pace with his grandiose schemes. The first emperor's budgetary ceilings could only have frustrated his expansionist policies. If Ch'eng-tsu had, upon his accession, totally revised the empire's fiscal structure, Chinese history during the following centuries might have taken a considerably different course; but he did not.

Ch'eng-tsu's annals have been thoroughly expurgated by imperial historians to make him appear as a benevolent ruler. His fiscal records have never been published, but a rough estimate would put his expenditures at two or three times the average levels for the first emperor's reign.

Indeed, Ch'eng-tsu circulated more paper money and demanded more grain production from his army units; but those measures alone could never have solved his fiscal problems. Although the details are not clear, the scattered evidence in many contemporary sources, when put together, suggests that taxation under the third emperor of the Ming was basically carried out by means of requisitions. Nominally, the tax rates were never increased; there were even select reductions. Yet, the service obligations of the populace were greatly extended. Tax-payers in the Yangtze delta were ordered to deliver their grain payments to Peking, which was over 1,000 miles away. Even when the army transportation corps took over some of the deliveries after the Grand Canal was opened for traffic, the surcharges collected from the tax-payers to cover the transportation costs equalled or exceeded the basic tax payments. Statute laborers who normally had been required to perform unpaid services for thirty days a year were forced to work for considerably longer periods, sometimes for over a year. Furthermore, during the early Ming, surplus commodities in government granaries were not sold in the marketplace.

They were distributed to pay for the materials and labor submitted by the populace beyond the statutory limits of taxation. The procedure was called "local procurement." Under Ch'eng-tsu, such orders were commonly executed. The compensation rendered for such goods comprised only a fraction of the actual market price.

Such practices undermined the tax system. While ostensibly retaining the first emperor's fixed quotas for state income, extraordinary demands were placed on all fiscal units. The extra financial burden was not apportioned according to any plan, but was distributed on the basis of uncoordinated local ad hoc decisions. Doubtless those who were least able to resist the extra impositions had to pay the most. Also, under Ch'eng-tsu, the secret police became more active; they were always ready to arrest those who grumbled about over-taxation. A prefect in the Southern Metropolitan Region who remonstrated to the throne against this excessive taxation was arrested by order of the emperor; he eventually died in Peking. Minister of revenue Hsia Yüan-chi, who was as close to the sovereign as anyone could be, tried to dissuade him from continuing his incessant military campaigns for fiscal reasons. Hsia was imprisoned for over three years for his efforts. Not until the Yung-Lo emperor's death in 1424 did he regain his freedom. When Jen-tsung acceded to the throne in that year, his general remission of taxes can be seen as a virtual apology for the oppressive tax policies of the previous reign. He noted in this decree that many fathers had sold their daughters and husbands their wives to meet their tax and service obligations to the government.¹

The compromise and concession

Morally and practically, such fiscal irresponsibility could not have been continued much longer. In the next decade Ch'eng-tsu's successors quietly retreated from his policies of unrestrained spending. Special concessions were made to mitigate the grievances of the general public. Yet, while those measures were taken, the financial organization of the founding emperor, which had been designed to suit his own peculiar vision of the social order and which now had little relevance to social and economic conditions in the empire, was never reconstructed. Later emperors could not escape being criticized for their lack of imagination in fiscal affairs, but the opportunity to introduce fundamental fiscal reforms may already have been permanently foreclosed.

¹ *MSL, Jen-tsung Shih-lu*, 1A, pp. 15-17.

When conducting his bloody assizes, T'ai-tsu had seen to it that the most prominent regional landholders were destroyed. Historians have been able to cite the Ho family in Kwangtung, the Hua family in Chekiang, and the Shen's, the Mo's, and the Chao's in the Southern Metropolitan Region as the most celebrated of his victims. Other affluent households liquidated at his command were reported to have been "countless."² The most fertile farm land in the Yangtze delta was "confiscated" by the emperor on the grounds that the local population had supported his political enemy. The remaining substantial landowners were drafted by the dynastic founder to provide unpaid services to the government. The sovereign kept a list of these households; at times he summoned the heads of such households to an imperial audience and lectured them. The younger members of the families were drafted as clerks, but, in reality, they were kept as hostages of a sort. Throughout T'ai-tsu's reign, the rural elite, represented by 14,341 households that held 700 *mu* of land or more, were altogether cowed by the power of the throne.³

Ch'eng-tsu, preoccupied with his construction projects and military campaigns, failed to exercise the same vigilance over local elites. In the last years of his reign, a new gentry class already appeared in the lower Yangtze region. They not only refused to provide additional services to the state, but they also kept their regular taxes in arrears. The properties that had been confiscated under T'ai-tsu and made over into official lands had never been placed under strict governmental supervision; they were bought and sold at will by the users. The rent due to the government and the ordinary land taxes were likewise transferred under private agreements without regard to the category of land being sold or bought. The effect of tax delinquency was cumulative: by 1430 the unpaid taxes in many districts exceeded three years' taxes.

As a part of his general policy of reconciliation, Hsüan-tsung, Ch'eng-tsu's grandson, decided to yield to public sentiment rather than to punish the tax delinquents. Tax quotas were somewhat reduced in those districts where taxes in arrears were highest. Newly appointed governors, invested with discretionary powers, were instructed to solve regional problems and, at the same time, to cultivate the good will of the populace. Most typical of these governors was Chou Ch'en, a pliable official assigned to the lower Yangtze region, which was the most important source of revenue for the empire. Reversing Cheng-tsu's method, Chou permitted reductions of tax collection.

² Wu Han, *Chu Yüan-chang chuan* (Shanghai, 1949), p. 138. Liang Fang-chung, *Ming-tai liang chang chih tu* (Shanghai, 1957), p. 21.

³ *MSL, T'ai-tsu shih-lu*, 179, p. 2704; 252, p. 3643.

Nominally, taxes were collected in full according to the original assessments. However, taxpayers in the highest brackets were authorized to substitute silver and other commodities for their tax in grain at substantial discounts, which usually amounted to more than half the amount assessed. No inquiry was made into the status of the confiscated properties. The same discount was applied to rents on government estates as well as to taxes on private land. The merger of these two rates of taxation was carried out with official sanction. There is little doubt that considerable concessions were offered to the gentry class. While praised by traditional historians, Chou was criticized by his contemporaries. One writer charged him with being “indiscriminately lenient,” and “serving as a protective umbrella for households of substance.” A later imperial instruction also commanded him to give due consideration to the financial abilities of individual taxpayers and not to overburden the common people.⁴

This sequence of events had profound significance for Ming fiscal history. It indicated that, by the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the Ming court had already lost much of its power to collect the revenues owed because of local landholding interests. A tax reduction was easily effected, but a subsequent general tax increase would have been far more difficult to implement.

In traditional China, basic tax laws were proclaimed by dynastic founders and enforced with the sword. An aggressive fiscal policy had a greater chance of success during a dynastic turnover than at any other time. Once conditions were stable, the population would resist change. The benefits from farm income that was lightly taxed seldom went to the primary producers. Because farm credit was difficult to secure, the local land tenure system, mortgage terms, and usurious interest rates combined to create a set of circumstances which made it practically impossible to increase tax rates beyond the existing level. This situation had particular relevance for the Ming fiscal administration. The dynasty relied on farm income for revenue far more than had been the case during the Sung, and even somewhat more than had been the case during the late T'ang. The bulk of the tax revenue was expected to be generated by the peasantry; tax rates had been fixed at a low level in light of the peasantry's limited ability to pay.

Although they had been seized with little regard to justice, the confiscated properties were utilized to counterbalance the low tax rates set for the general population. The government's inability to maintain the existing rates of taxation on those estates indicates how lax its control over local administration had become. Such concessions to the southern gentry set a bad precedent.

4 Lu Jung, *Shu-yüan Tsa-chi* (1494, rpt. in vols. 131–32 of *T'ung-shu Chi-ch'eng*, Taipei, 1963–66), 5, p. 54. *MSL, Ying-tung Shih-lu*, 116, pp. 2349–50.

Koyama Masaki's study, based on the *belles-lettres* of the early Ming, suggests that the new gentry class represented a type of household that was associated with those of the scholar-official class who cultivated their land using household farm labor.⁵ The composition of these households was so amorphous, and their operation involved so many subtleties, that no effective government control over them was possible.

In brief, both T'ai-tsu and Ch'eng-tsu, relying on the strength of their military organizations, could have created a more rational government financial system and established more effective control over it. But T'ai-tsu endeavored to build up an ideal society under his personal rule, and Ch'eng-tsu put instant grandeur ahead of organization. At the very beginning of the dynasty, T'ai-tsu elected to establish a narrow and rigid basis for taxation, a skeletal administrative staff, and a policy of noninterference in the administration of rural villages. Unless a subsequent emperor decided to reconquer his own realm, he would find broad and general institutional reform practically beyond his means. The government simply had not developed sufficient organizational strength to regenerate or reorganize itself. The despotic power of the throne remained unchallengeable in certain areas: in personnel management within the government; in handing down judicial decisions; and in commandeering public revenue for private expenses. But such despotic power could not be easily used to implement changes in the rate and structure of taxation, which required much broader organizational and technical support. The Ming system lacked such support.

The fiscal situation after 1430

In the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the Ming fiscal administration reached its maturity. Many ad hoc fiscal practices had, by then, become permanently established. Regional tax quotas proclaimed by T'ai-tsu were retained with few readjustments. It remained possible for fiscal units to be decreased or increased, but only within narrow limits, and they were never again to be so arbitrarily set as they had been during the Yung-lo reign. Control over the empire's fiscal data, including population figures and cultivated acreages, became perfunctory; most territorial units simply resubmitted their earlier reports as the new returns. Since tax deliveries were largely carried out at the lower levels of the government, the capacity at the middle echelon of the fiscal administration to deal with logistic matters was never fully developed. Even the submission of tax grain through the Grand Canal, called "tribute grain"

⁵ Koyama Masaaki, "Minmatsu Shinsho no daitochi shoyū-toku ni Kōnan deruta chitai o chūshin to shite," *Shigaku zasshi*, 66, No. 12 (Dec. 1957), pp. 1029–32.

by Western scholars, was carried out by squadrons of army boats that moved along the waterway. Fiscal responsibility for the cargo in transit rested with the junior officers commanding such boats and was never integrated into the responsibilities of an office at a higher level. Most of the tax revenues, fixed by permanent or semi-permanent delivery schedules, was committed, largely for regular administrative expenses, before it was collected. There was little likelihood that the empire's financial resources could be used to implement a new policy. By the late fifteenth century, emperors gradually withdrew from public affairs; they seemed to be more concerned with their gracious living arrangements inside the palace. Even disagreements between the emperor and the courtiers on strictly public issues became rare, since neither had the capacity to innovate. Only in the sixteenth century, owing to the gradual commutation of tax and service obligations into silver and to a spate of military crises, were the dynasty's fiscal arrangements slightly modified.

The numerous charges of over-taxation by contemporary writers should not distract our attention from the fact that the legitimate tax revenues of the Ming state were much smaller than those collected under the Sung dynasty about 400 years earlier. However, readjustments of conversion rates, the collection of surcharges, and demands for labor services from the general population, were actions that created many fiscal irregularities. Such irregularities encouraged corruption. In the latter part of the dynasty, because state revenues were insufficient to meet the operating expenses of the government, tax collections in addition to those normally scheduled were, in fact, connived at by local administrators. Poorly managed, such extra impositions usually placed the financial burden on the weak and inarticulate and constituted a retrogressive system of taxation, while, at the same time, the revenues collected were hardly sufficient to serve public interests. The state, unable to husband the empire's resources, failed to develop an adequate monetary system, to control credit, or to protect prices of agricultural goods. Those failures made the level of taxation unbearable for some taxpayers. The lack of capital prevented the government from generating income from sources other than the taxation of agriculture. For all these reasons, the Ming approach to fiscal administration must be seen as a long stride backward from the approaches used by such earlier dynasties as the T'ang and the Sung. The central government's lack of operating capacity also made its financial system inferior to the Yüan dynasty's system. Technically speaking, the fundamental cause of the failure was not over-taxation, but, paradoxically, the under-taxation that had resulted from a combination of unique circumstances early in the dynasty.

FISCAL ORGANIZATION AND GENERAL PRACTICES

The emperor as the chief fiscal administrator

Under the Ming fiscal system, the emperor himself was the sole central authority administering the empire's finances. The grand secretaries' official duties were limited to drafting rescripts. Sometimes consulted by the emperor, they participated in decision-making, but were not accorded any independent power. Throughout the dynasty's history only a handful of people managed to exercise the power reserved to the throne, notably, the grand secretary, Chang Chü-cheng, during the reign of Shen-tsung, and the "eunuch dictators," Wang Chen, Liu Chin, and Wei Chung-hsien, respectively, during the reigns of Ying-tsung, Wu-tsung, and Hsi-tsung. However, although Chang gained his powerful position through an informal arrangement with the court, the formality of seeking the sovereign's approval on major and minor matters could not be disputed. The eunuchs, often with the connivance of the emperors, violated virtually every fundamental law of the state. All of them were condemned later as traitors or charged with conspiracy. It is noteworthy that none of these three powerful eunuchs died a natural death, and Chang Chü-cheng was disgraced posthumously. In theory, at least, imperial power could not be, and never was, delegated.

The emperor received memorials from a large number of censors, supervising secretaries, and ministerial officials, including division heads and section chiefs. Suggestions and criticisms concerning fiscal matters could be initiated by practically anyone, regardless of his area of specialization and current assignment. The sovereign was also approached by scores of imperial commissioners, governors and governors-general. Their proposals and requests could be handed to the Ministry of Revenue for comment, or when important issues were involved, referred to the Conference of Nine Ministers for deliberation, but the final arbiter was always the emperor.

The policies and proclamations of T'ai-tsu and Ch'eng-tsu were honored by their successors as, in Charles Hucker's words, "a kind of dynastic constitution."⁶ Obviously, the inability of later emperors to reform earlier institutional arrangements reinforced their reverence for the legislation of their ancestors. Yet, the established order was not entirely inviolable: from time to time, emperors authorized piecemeal revisions of the fiscal system. Steps leading to such changes followed a pattern. They usually started with a petition from a lower-ranked bureaucrat containing a request for an exception intended to apply to those under the jurisdiction of his office alone. The emperor's approval of the request, which, most likely, was granted along

6 Charles O. Hucker, *The Traditional Chinese State in Ming Times, 1268-1644* (Tucson, 1961), p. 78.

with other routine matters, then established the required precedent. Sooner or later, similar petitions were submitted and approved until the original exception to the rule had become a standard practice. Thereafter, no formal petition for the exception for another case was required; either an imperial decree directed the remaining offices to follow suit, or the rest of the administration implemented the reform without explicit approval. This method of accomplishing change meant that a major departure from early Ming practices could take as long as several decades to carry out, with the proceedings never being fully coordinated or organized.

On the other hand, the removal of existing restrictions, especially when the restrictions could not be effectively enforced, took much less time. A relevant example is the way in which permission to use silver as a common medium of exchange was allowed. It started with a petition from a prefect from Kwangsi; the original proposal applied only to the use of copper coins in private trade. Apparently, the precedent that this request established was quickly applied to other areas, and soon, the earlier decree proscribing the private circulation of silver became defunct as well. It is not inaccurate to say that the Ming emperors' decrees sometimes had the same general effect that judiciary decisions handed down by a supreme court in the Western world have. Despite all its authority, the throne took a passive rather than active role in formulating policies and regulating society.

The palace compound in Peking comprised a huge area in which were located dozens of warehouses, depots, and material processing and manufacturing plants. Even though these installations in the capital were primarily concerned with supplying the palace, together they formed a service and supply center that was undoubtedly the largest of its kind in the world at that time. The Court of Imperial Entertainments, for instance, regularly employed 6,000 to 9,000 cooks. The mechanics of palace supply was a complex story in itself. Most of the materials were contributed by districts throughout the empire, each of which was apportioned a fixed quota for certain goods in addition to the regular land tax, which tax was considered a special type of tribute. A portion of the receivables, however, also was derived from the commutation of land taxes. Two special items, porcelain and imperial satins, were manufactured in the southern provinces under the supervision of palace eunuchs. Part of the cost incurred by these manufacturing enterprises was deducted from the tax quotas of the districts in which they were situated. All the manpower required by the palace compound was furnished by registered artisans, their unpaid services being considered as their tax obligation to the state. The accounts for all these services and supplies were not integrated into any kind of master account. Depending on their contents, the warehouses were designated as "belonging to" various ministries. Actually,

however, the ministerial officials only kept the books, while the palace eunuchs kept the keys. The final disposition of the inventory was the emperor's prerogative. Thus, the emperor also acted as his own chief fiscal administrator within the palace compound.

After 1436, the Ministry of Revenue had annually provided the emperor with a cash income of one million taels of silver, called the "gold floral silver" (*chin-hua yin*). This account had been created by partially commuting some land taxes normally paid in kind to payment in silver. From this purse, the emperor had to pay the army officers in Peking, but not the civil officials, nor the army officers outside the capital. The surplus was available for his own expenses and was not subject to official audits. This did not mean, however, that the emperor's personal expenditures were not considered part of the state's expenditures. If the emperor so wished, he could, at any time, order the Ministry of Revenue to transfer funds from its treasuries to his private treasury in the imperial palace. Such transfers often took place during the reigns of Hsien-tsung, Hsiao-tsung, Shih-tsung and Shen-tsung.

Palace expenditures under the Ming grew over the course of the dynasty; but the trend of growth was not steady or unbroken. Usually, upon the accession of a new emperor, there was a considerable cutback; however, almost without exception, this retrenchment was followed by new waves of increased expenses. The palace staff was large. The number of eunuchs on the staff from the mid-fifteenth century to mid-sixteenth century fluctuated between 10,000 to 30,000 men. One modern scholar claims that by the end of the dynasty there were 70,000 eunuchs in service.⁷ Two separate estimates by Ming ministerial officials indicated that, by 1600, the routine annual deliveries of material to palace warehouses had a value of four to five million taels of silver, which figure excludes incidental expenses and the costs of palace construction.⁸ Even though the picture is incomplete, it seems that at least 20 to 25 percent of all imperial tax revenues must have been spent within the palace compound.

In view of the relative paucity of state revenues, such prodigious palace expenses put fiscal priorities in the wrong order, to say the least. Of course the ostentatious luxuriant tastes of the individual emperors were contributing factors. Yet, the extravagance of palace life was also closely associated with the enormous size of the palace staff and the elaborate sacrificial ceremonies conducted by the state, both of which were traditional arrangements based

7 Ting I, *Ming tai t'eu cheng chih* (Peking, 1950), pp. 22–26.

8 Sun Ch'eng-tse, *Ch'un-ming meng-yü-lu* (n.d., mid-seventeenth century; rpt. Nan-hai, 1883; rpt. Hong Kong, 1965), 35, p. 21. Feng Ch'i, *Tsung-po chi* (ed. of ca. 1607, Hishi copy in Naikaku Bunko, Tokyo, made by Takeo Hiraoka of Kyoto University, 1975), 51, p. 34.

on precedents set before the beginning of the common era. The items cited most frequently in lists of goods supplied to the palace compound were tea, wax, food, dyes, leather, and cotton cloth, along with the procurement of silk fabrics and porcelain mentioned earlier. To give some idea of the scale of the palace expenditures, a procurement order for the porcelain could run to a quarter million pieces. Serving no functional purpose, the pomp and splendor of the court was an endless drain on the economy of the empire.

The Ministry of Revenue and its rival agencies

At the beginning of the dynasty, the Ministry of Revenue was organized on the basis of T'ang dynasty precedents. It was divided into four functionally differentiated departments, in charge of vital fiscal statistics, budgetary control, treasury deposits, and granary reserves, respectively. A general affairs office was created but later abolished. The system remained in effect until 1390; in that year the functionally differentiated departments were replaced by territorial bureaus. At first, twelve bureaus were created to correspond to the twelve existing provinces. Under Ch'eng-tsu, the number of bureaus increased to fourteen. After 1436, there were thirteen bureaus. Matters not under the jurisdiction of the provinces were parceled out and arbitrarily assigned to various bureaus. Only in 1575 were matters concerning the Northern and Southern Metropolitan Regions, the salt monopoly, inland customs stations, the granaries on the Grand Canal, and imperial stables and pastures, placed under the Fukien, Szechwan, Shantung, Yunnan, Kwangsi, and Kweichow bureaus respectively. The extra assignments balanced each bureau's volume of office work.

The reorganization of 1390 had great significance for Chinese fiscal history. It reflected T'ai-tsu's approach to governmental finance, which emphasized regional tax quotas, lateral business transactions at lower levels, and the omission of fiscal planning at the top. Under normal circumstances, incomes and expenditures were managed according to established precedents; the revenue deliveries were expected to be automatic. The main function of the Ministry of Revenue was to see that scheduled deliveries were made promptly. Only when circumstances required would the ministry recommend that the emperor sanction minor readjustments in the supply procedure, further commutation of tax payments to silver, and revisions of the commutation rates. These measures were used to establish small cash income accounts that were allocated to meet some special need.

The minister of revenue, therefore, was not a policy maker. He had no executive officer, no comptroller, and no chief statistician. He himself served in those capacities under the emperor. The office organization provided him

with two vice-ministers. One of the vice-ministers was customarily appointed superintendent of imperial granaries around the capital. This vice-minister maintained a separate office and reported directly to the emperor. The T'ai-ts'ang Treasury, which, after its establishment in 1442, handled all the silver bullion of the ministry, was also under his supervision. The other vice-minister was usually given a field assignment: commissioner in charge of the Grand Canal, for example, or superintendent of military supplies to Manchuria, and was thus usually absent from the office.

The Ministry of Revenue had no regional offices in the provinces. The inland customs stations outside Peking, however, were managed by the ministerial personnel, usually secretaries on temporary leaves of absence from one or another of the ministry's various bureaus. Toward the end of the dynasty, vice-ministers were put in charge of services and supplies for field armies. Some of these vice-ministers were supernumeraries appointed in addition to the two regular vice-ministers. They functioned as imperial commissioners of a sort. Other officials of lesser rank (for example, directors and vice directors of territorial bureaus) were likewise dispatched to the frontier to oversee the logistics of supplying the armies on campaign. For all practical purposes, they were on loan from the ministry to the governors-general on the border. At best, they maintained a close liaison between the army command and their office in Peking, but in no significant way did these officials extend the ministry's authority to the provinces or to the borders.

Under the Ming system, the Ministry of War, to a lesser extent, and the Ministry of Works, to a greater extent, virtually competed with the Ministry of Revenue in the area of fiscal management. This division of authority went back to arrangements made during the early years of the dynasty, when money was not commonly used to pay taxes. At that time, the land taxes in large areas extending over four provinces had been reduced by one-half in exchange for stable services provided by select households for the upkeep of government horses. When these services were discontinued, however, the Ministry of Revenue was not authorized to increase the taxes for these areas. Instead, the civilian households who were previously obligated to perform these stable services were ordered to deliver payments in silver called "horse payments" to the Court of the Imperial Stud. This practice made half of the regular land taxes in the affected areas collectible by the Ministry of War.

The Ministry of Works not only collected the forest produce levy of many stations and appropriated part of the fish duty, but also requisitioned materials and funds from all provinces. In addition, it conscripted statutory labor. Skilled labor was levied from those households which were registered as arti-

sans, unskilled labor was provided by the general population. Since the commutation of those obligations in Ming times took place gradually, the Ministry of Works slowly became the recipient of a host of commuted silver payments from the provinces. This revenue, which enabled the ministry to remain self-sufficient, may be seen as an enormous expense account derived directly from taxation. The ministry was thus, in reality, a tax-collecting agency that rivaled the Ministry of Revenue.

The T'ai-ts'ang Treasury, under the Ministry of Revenue, was not a central treasury. It was only one of several silver vaults in Peking. Until the end of the sixteenth century, it had an annual income of about 4 million taels of silver. It exercised no control over the Ch'eng-yin Treasury, which came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works. Furthermore, after the dual-capital system was put into effect in 1421, the Ministry of Revenue in Nanking operated rather autonomously. Even though it carried out certain functions, it was by no means a branch office of its counterpart in Peking. The Minister of Revenue in the southern capital (Nanking) held the same rank as the minister of revenue in the Northern capital (Peking). He also maintained his own granaries, warehouses, and silver vaults and reported directly to the emperor. Without an explicit directive from the throne, no surplus funds in any treasury could be transferred from one ministry to another.

Regional administrative agencies

Local governments were structured either as four-tiered or three-tiered administrative hierarchies. The administrative tiers of the four level type included the province, prefecture, sub-prefecture, and the county in this descending order. In the three-tiered structure, a sub-prefecture was directly subordinate to the provincial government and the intermediate level of a prefecture was omitted, or a county was directly subordinate to a prefecture, and the intermediate level of a sub-prefecture was omitted. There were also sub-prefectures which, while subordinate to a prefecture, had no counties under them. The two metropolitan areas, each the size of a province, had no provincial administrations. The prefects and the independent sub-prefects in these areas reported directly to the central government. As a result, the fiscal accounts of their districts were placed on the same footing as those of the thirteen provinces and were never consolidated at the intermediate level.

The organizational principle behind this arrangement was that counties comprised the basic tax collecting unit, prefectures the basic tax assessment unit, and the provinces, the revenue transit unit. Sub-prefectures either broke large prefectures into administratively manageable units or covered territories which had an intermediate level of revenue, but were in areas that

were remote or difficult of access. Created to adjust this imbalance, the sub-prefecture had no distinctive administrative features of its own. When the sub-prefecture was subordinate to a prefecture, it functioned as a branch office of the prefect. If it was immediately subordinate to a province, it functioned as a prefecture of a minor order.⁹ When a level of government became unnecessary in the chain of command, it was eliminated. Since all the prefectures of the two metropolitan areas were close to administrative offices of the northern and southern capitals, provincial organs were considered superfluous.

Under this monolithic fiscal structure, there was no great difference between the central government and local government. In a sense, all revenues were imperial incomes. There were no needs of the central government that could not be met by provincial and local sources of revenue. Under this arrangement, the provincial and local governments had no discretionary funds. Any unexpected expenditure connected with the routine and regular expense of operating the government could only be paid with public funds upon the approval of the emperor, even when the required funds were available at local offices. On such occasions, the imperial order not only specified the amount to be disbursed, but also the account that was to be debited. So, the financial resources of the empire always remained fragmented. No fiscal officer at any level could integrate the funds under his control and handle them as a consolidated account.

All territorial units were expected to be self-sufficient; only on rare occasions were grants-in-aid delivered by adjacent districts at the direction of the central government. A consignment of revenue from a financial officer's district that was delivered outside his district constituted an item referred to as *ch'i-yun*, literally, a "checked-out item," which we shall refer to as "transferred revenue." Upon delivery, the item was removed from the local administrator's accounts. The balance of a tax revenue item that remained in the officer's district was called *ts'un-liu*, literally a "staying-in item," but we shall refer to it as "retained revenue." Practically every item of tax revenue was divided in this way in the collecting district's accounts. From the retained revenue, the local official drew funds and paid the routine operating expenses of his office; again, no distinction was made between imperial expenditures and local expenditures. Any surplus was kept for the emperor. From time to time, the central government directed provincial and local officials to execute local procurement orders (*tso-pan*), the costs being deductible from the retained revenue. Therefore, retained revenue (*ts'un-liu*) was neither a surplus nor a local

9 This is explained in *MS*, 75, p. 803.

income; in reality, it was that portion of revenue which the local officials administered in their capacity as regional treasurers of the imperial government.

Of all the officials of the imperial government, the county magistrate always had the heaviest fiscal responsibility. This arrangement reflects the particular style of the administration established under the first emperor, which emphasized decentralized operation under centralized control.

Except for the maritime and inland customs duties, the forest produce levy, the salt revenue, and some administrative revenues which were collected and managed by special agencies and higher offices, practically all state revenues passed through the hands of the county magistrate. The collection of land taxes, including surcharges, was carried out at the county level. Most of the magistrates also handled the local business tax, stamp tax, store franchise fees, license fees, excise on wine and vinegar, fines, payments for rationed salt, and part of the fish duty. The magistrate managed public land in his district, filled material requisitions, called statute laborers to service, and, when the service was commuted, collected the payments. Wherever land reclamation programs were in effect, or horse stabling service by civilian households required, or should the proceeds from military farmlands have to be collected, the magistrate was considered wholly responsible. In addition, the magistrate conducted periodic population registrations, compiled, for his jurisdiction, the registers of arable land and households liable for labor service known as the Yellow Books (*huang-ts'ê*), organized the village communities called *li-chia*, and assessed on them the service levy (see section on *The Service Levy* below).

At the intermediate level, the prefect's fiscal responsibility was largely supervisory. The prefect saw to it that all the scheduled tax deliveries were properly carried out and that the reserves were kept in good order. He also was in charge of a number of local agencies, including the prefectural granary, the police, the postal service, and the business tax and fish duty stations. Some of these installations, however, did not exist in some prefectures. In certain areas, there were major water-gates in the canals and rivers, sometimes government mines, pastures, dyeing, weaving, and miscellaneous manufacturing plants – all of which required the prefect's attention.

At the beginning of the dynasty, taxes were assessed on each prefecture. By the late fourteenth century, prefectural tax quotas had become relatively stable. Only internal readjustments were made from time to time. The prefect had a certain unspecified authority to readjust the quotas of the subordinate counties. Normally, no prefect would simply increase or decrease a county's tax quota, but he could suggest changing the destinations of certain tax deliveries, modifying surcharges, and revising rates of commutation: all measures

which, to some degree, reapportioned the tax burden among the subordinate counties.

The way the local government functioned under the Ming cannot be explained in more detail without referring to real cases. Some vigorous magistrates and prefects acutally revised internal tax procedures, directed the reapportionment of payments among individual taxpayers, and even conducted local land surveys. They were never authorized under the laws of the dynasty to do so. During the later part of dynasty, a local official had relative freedom in redefining fiscal procedures in his district, but not procedures that affected other offices. Explicit approval from the higher echelon might or might not be sought, depending on the circumstances. But, since the fiscal structure was monolithic, any reform at a lower level had to be piecemeal and limited in scope. Furthermore, local officials exercised discretionary power at their own risk. Unless he was noted for his character, prestige, and resourcefulness, by revising existing procedures a magistrate exposed himself to impeachment by censorial officials; or, he might find that the local gentry refused to cooperate with him. On the other hand, if his reforms were successful, they would eventually gain the status of common law.

Executive agencies were less integrated at the provincial level. The provincial administration office was the chief fiscal agency, but the surveillance commissioner's office was also authorized to inspect water-control projects, tribute grain, land reclamation, the salt administration, the postal service, and sometimes military defense. During the second half of the dynasty, the investigative function of the surveillance commissioner often exceeded its original limits. Almost every surveillance commissioner produced some income of his own, partly through fines and confiscations, and partly through the commutation of services and supplies in various projects and programs under his supervision.

The provincial administration office was headed by an administrative commissioner of the left and an administrative commissioner of the right; the former being the senior. The office kept vital statistical records, corresponded with the ministries on budget, tax, and procurement matters, and was responsible for all cash deposits, granary reserves, warehouse stocks, and military supplies within the province. Whenever it was physically possible, transactions were carried out at the county and prefectural levels or even by the general population. The provincial offices also had a limited operating capacity similar to that of the Ministry of Revenue. Each province was considered a revenue transit unit only to the extent that items of revenue, including supplies to frontier army posts, to the twin capitals, and subsidies to adjacent provinces, were accounted for at the provincial level, and to the extent that the

administrative commissioners were responsible to the central government for such deliveries.

Owing to the wide use of silver, it became possible, during the middle period of the dynasty, to concentrate some financial resources at the provincial level. The decline of the military colony (*wei-so*) system, which forced provincial officials to organize their own defenses, was also conducive to the concentration of fiscal authority at the provincial level. Such developments did not uniformly occur in all locales. The concentration of fiscal functions at the provincial level was far more common in the south than elsewhere.

The appointment of provincial governors, beginning from 1430, gave rise to a number of organizational ambiguities. At first, these governorships were not intended to be permanent offices. A governor was originally an individual delegated by the central government to tour a particular province or a part of a metropolitan area. As this practice developed, governors and governors-general came to hold their positions for set terms. They established regular offices, and considered the administrative commissioners to be members of their staff. Yet, the provincial administration office never came completely under the jurisdiction of the governor's office. In general, governors submitted their memorials directly to the emperor, and the administrative commissioners maintained their regular channels of communication with the ministries. The former reported on specific matters and the latter on general or routine matters. Until the end of the dynasty, the ministries, not the governors, still had jurisdiction over the administrative commissioners and were ultimately responsible for fiscal delinquencies in the provinces.

In Ming times, circuit intendants were not, strictly speaking, fiscal officials. They were deputies of the provincial administrative and surveillance commissioners strategically posted in the provinces to expedite field operations. By the sixteenth century, many circuit intendants made on-the-spot decisions about fiscal matters; in some cases, some of them even approved tax reforms initiated by local prefects. Even the court in Peking, at times, assigned specific duties to individual circuit intendants. But, under the standard accounting procedures, a circuit was not recognized as a regular fiscal unit.

Very few revenue and service agencies directly controlled by the central government operated in the provinces. Whenever possible, the officials in charge of those agencies were given a concurrent provincial assignment so that they could use their regional offices to establish a logistical base from which to carry out their special functions. The superintendent of tea and horse trade was usually concurrently appointed governor, or governor-general, of Shensi. The imperial commissioner of the Grand Canal, who had certain responsibilities for the transit of the tribute grain to Peking, as a rule concurrently held the title governor of Huai-an. The governor of Nanking

simultaneously acted as superintendant in charge of grain supplies for the southern metropolitan region.

Neither the inland customs stations, which came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Revenue, nor the forest produce levy stations, which came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works, were ever organized as separate service agencies with their own chains of command. The officials in charge of these stations were ministerial personnel on temporary assignments: they had to rely on local officials for logistical support and to deliver revenues. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, all such stations were in fact jointly operated by the ministries and the local prefects.

The organization that managed the salt monopoly was most unusual. All six salt distribution commissions and eight salt distribution superintendencies came under the jurisdiction of a provincial administration: the commissions being in charge of major productive centers and the superintendencies in charge of minor ones. In practice, the central government exercised direct control over the Liang-Huai, Liang-che, Ch'ang-lu, and Shantung commissions, leaving the remaining units under the jurisdiction of provincial administrations. Direct control was implemented by dispatching salt control censors to these centers of salt production. These officials initiated standing operating procedures for their respective districts. On important matters they made recommendations to the emperor; on minor matters, they gave orders directly to the operating agencies under their supervision.

As members of the censorial branch of the government, salt control censors were not subordinate to the Ministry of Revenue. In exercising their executive power in the salt-producing centers, they must be regarded as imperial commissioners of a sort. The revenues of these four commissions were delivered directly to the Ministry of Revenue. Revenues from the other ten units were retained, in part, by the provincial officials to defray the costs of the regional administration, while part was remitted to disbursing agencies on orders from the central government. The central government's supervision of the salt monopoly, particularly in Yunnan, but also in Kwangtung and Szechwan, was nominal.

For most of the dynasty, international trade was not regarded as a source of public revenue. Even though so-called maritime trade superintendencies were established at Ning-po, Canton, and Ch'üan-chou, those agencies were concerned mainly with the reception of tributary emissaries, who sometimes brought with them such bulky cargoes as sulphur, pepper, and sapanwood in exchange for imperial gifts. According to extant records, the tributary trade always resulted in financial losses to the Ming state. Restrictions on international trade were lifted only in the sixteenth century. Canton was opened for private trade in 1509, temporarily closed after 1523, and then re-

opened in 1529. In 1567, Yüeh-kang, adjacent to the modern city of Amoy in Fukien, was also opened to Chinese merchants for overseas trade. At both ports, the maritime tariff was managed by the circuit intendants in charge of coastal defense under the governor and the governors-general.¹⁰ The proceeds, which never amounted to an appreciable sum, were retained by the circuit officials for regional defense expenses. At no time did the central government take an active part in the administration.

Military organizations and army logistics

After the fiscal system became stable during the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the Ming army, owing to its separate supply channels, appeared to comprise three distinct components. The capital garrisons in Nanking and Peking were administered directly by the central government.

The garrisons on the northern frontier came under the jurisdiction of a number of defense areas (*pien* or *chen*). The number of these defense areas fluctuated between seven and nine until the mid-sixteenth century. Finally, in the late sixteenth century, their number grew to fourteen, when five minor areas were elevated to the same status as the nine major defense areas. A defense area was supervised by a governor or a governor-general; sometimes several governors worked together under the supervision of a governor-general. These defense areas differed from military establishments in the interior provinces insofar as they had territories under their jurisdictions. Most of the guard units (*wei*) under them filled the role of local government in frontier regions as well. Each command produced some internally generated supplies under the rubric of military farming, although, in reality, this income might have been derived from a variety of sources, including rents collected from public lands. None of the defense areas was self-sufficient. Subsidies were delivered by the districts in four northern provinces (namely, Shantung, Shansi, Honan, and Shensi). In addition, the imperial government also provided annuities.

In the interior provinces the supply procedure was more decentralized. In general, each prefecture remained the basic fiscal unit. Proceeds from military farming, if any, were collected by the county magistrates and augmented with portions of retained revenue derived from the land tax. The prefect used these revenues to pay the army units in his district. The financial burden

10 Chang Hsieh, *Tung-hsi-yang k'ao* (1618; rpt Taipei, 1962), 7, pp. 95–98. Liang Fang-chung, “Ming-tai kuo-chi mao-i yü yin-ti shu-ch'ü-yü,” *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih chi-k'ao*, 6, No. 2 (1939), pp. 292–93, 303. Katayama Seiichirō, “Gekkō nijyushi-shō no hanran,” *Shimizu hakase tsuitō kinen Mindaiishi ronsō* (Tokyo, 1962), pp. 407–09. The military role of circuit intendants is discussed on pp. 79–81 of this volume.

thus placed on the prefectures was unequal. Some prefectures were obligated to pay for two or more guard units (*wei-so*), while some prefectures supported only chiliarchies (*ch'ien-hu so*).

The administrative hierarchy established under T'ai-tsu for the military, including the chief military commissions in the central government and the regional military commissions in the provinces, almost passed into oblivion. The occupants of those offices derived their ranks from appointments to these positions only. In the sixteenth century, all civil officials appointed as governors or governors-general (with the exception of the governor of Kwangsi), were concurrently put in charge of military affairs. In matters of army logistics, the governors dealt with the military defense circuit intendants. The intendants, nominally deputies of the provincial surveillance commissioners, in reality commanded the army units in their circuits; these officials of the military bureaucracy therefore operated as mere technicians under their supervisor.

STATE REVENUES AND THEIR DISTRIBUTIONS

The land tax

The land tax (*fu*) constituted, by far, the largest item of state revenue, dwarfing all other revenues combined, but a great many difficulties beset its administration. One set of problems had to do with land tenure, acreage assessment, and property registration; these problems, in turn, affected the apportionment of taxes. Land tax collection was further complicated by the fact that the tax could be paid in either grain or silver. This double fiscal standard introduced complexities in accounting, budgeting, and the appropriation of revenue. In sum, most of complexities in the land tax administration can be said to have resulted from the demand for central control over fiscal administration. An over-ambitious scheme to control land-tax assessment, collection, and disbursement, designed at the top level of the administrative hierarchy, could not cope with all the realities at the bottom. In the end, the tax administration was characterized by uniformity in form, but infinite diversity in practice.

The land tax was based on the "two tax system." The "summer tax," basically in wheat, was originally to be collected in the eighth lunar month of the year. The "autumn grain," basically in husked rice, was to be collected in the second month of the year after the harvest. Landed properties which yielded double crops paid tax twice. Except for a very short period during the first years of the dynasty, this tax scheme was never put into practice. In most districts, the quotas for these two taxes were collectively assessed on the entire district and then reapportioned on the basis of the district's entire

cultivated acreage and the number of households able to pay taxes. Sixteenth-century tax accounts often show that a fish pond was liable for a small payment of summer tax in wheat and a similar payment of autumn grain in husked rice. By then, however, both taxes had been commuted to payments in silver. The previously mentioned tax deadlines, however, were not uniformly observed. Each county had to deliver its tax proceeds to a number of disbursing agencies, rarely less than ten, and usually more than twenty. Each delivery had its specified deadline. The local officials set their own tax deadlines to meet their delivery obligations. For individual taxpayers, the payments were usually spread over several unequal installments, with the largest installment payable immediately after the harvest of the major crop. Such procedures differed from one county to another.

The land tax, in principle, was imposed at a fixed rate which was uniformly applied to the aggregate acreage of each prefecture. The unit of land measurement was the *mu*, which was equivalent to approximately 6,000 square feet. But this uniform rate, common to all prefectures, represented only an external assessment by the central government. Per *mu* productivity varied widely in China, the richest rice paddy land sometimes yielding ten times more than the poorest dry land in the same district. Each district still had to reapportion the central government's assessment according to the different grades of land, and this gave rise to varied internal rates of assessment within the district.

To solve the problem of how to grade arable land, most districts found the solution in the so-called "fiscal *mu* conversion." Ping-ti Ho has amassed a great amount of data to illustrate how it worked.¹¹ In general, each *mu* of standard measure which had an average or above average yield was assessed as a fiscal *mu*. Less productive land was converted into fiscal *mu* by counting one and a half, two, three, or even eight or ten *mu*, as one fiscal *mu*. While the tax base was narrow (by which we mean the amount of revenue collected), the application of the land tax assessment was quite broad. In addition to cultivated land, the tax was assessed on mulberry trees, orchards, fish ponds, woodlands, acreages of reeds, and so forth. On Hainan island, even palm trees were counted and assessed. The geographical diversity within the empire was such that neither a uniform scheme governing fiscal *mu* conversion nor any other universal scheme to readjust assessments was feasible. Even in the late sixteenth century, there were still complaints that within a single district, taxable land could not be accurately and justly graded by a general standard. The natural outcome was that each district came to have its own formula for

11 Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368-1913* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 102-23.

assessing local land and rateable properties. In some special cases, the 6,000 square foot standard *mu* was completely ignored. Instead, the local district introduced its own unit of measurement which was designed to allow for the most convenient readjustment. The methods by which land was assessed and the resulting internal rates of assessment thus showed great variety.

Until the 1960s, it had been thought that, under T'ai-tsu, an empire-wide land survey had been conducted some time around 1386. Recent studies by Shimizu Taiji, Fujii Hiroshi, and Ping-ti Ho, however, point out that only agricultural land in Chekiang and the Southern Metropolitan Region was surveyed with care. The exact records of land under cultivation in each province for the early Ming period were compiled by a variety of methods. The amount of land under cultivation reported for Honan and Hukwang, in particular, amounted to no more than random estimates that included large areas of arable land suitable for future reclamation. After comparing the land data of hundreds of Ming local gazetteers, Fujii suggests that the taxable land of the empire actually increased from some 366,000,000 *mu* in 1381 to some 510,000,000 *mu* in 1578.¹² These findings have only relative value. One must realize that after the tax quota system had been put into effect, reports of the amount of land under cultivation had virtually no significance for the central government. The compilation of empire-wide statistics, which even at the very outset was fraught with numerous technical difficulties, could not have become more meticulous after the requirement to report was relaxed. In the seventeenth century, when land tax increases were ordered to meet the Manchu crisis, the Ministry of Revenue in general used the 1578 tabulation of land under cultivation as a guide to apportioning the tax increment at the provincial level. At the same time, however, the ministry acknowledged that these statistics were not accurate and that many readjustments would have to be made.¹³

Even in those districts where the land survey had been repeatedly conducted, tax control through the registration of land deeds was ineffective. In the region of rice culture, local topography had a tendency to change constantly because of the traditional irrigation system. This system often ran counter to the forces of nature and thus tended to increase the frequency and intensity of flooding. The pattern of land-holding and inheritance further divided tracts of land into numerous small patches and plots. Few landowners

12 Fujii Hiroshi, "Mindai dendo tōkei ni kansuru ichikōsatsu," *Tōyō gakubō*, 30, No. 3 (1943), pp. 386–419; 30, No. 4 (1944), pp. 506–33; 31, No. 1 (1947), pp. 97–143. The findings are summarized by the same author in Wada Sei, ed., *Minshi Shokokashi yakuchū* (Tokyo, 1957), vol. 1, pp. 55–56.

13 MSL, *Shen-tsung Shib-lu*, 574, pp. 10862–63. Ch'eng K'ai-hu, ed., *Chou-Liao Shib-huo* (ca. 1620) rpt. in Vols. 1–12 of *Ch'ing shih tsu liao* (Taipei, 1968), 11, pp. 13–17; 15, p. 41b.

had integrated and compact estates. Local officials, three to five in each county, plus a dozen or so lesser functionaries, could not exercise close scrutiny over the accounts of some 10,000 to 50,000 households. Usually, the land survey was conducted by village scribes with a minimum of official supervision. Property transactions were registered only once in every ten years. Only in those years when the Yellow Book was compiled would the land tax transfer take effect. These conditions left much room for manipulation. While outright tax evasion was rare, there were many ways for individual landowners to reduce their tax liabilities to the minimum. An affluent landowner could parcel out a small portion of his properties for sale at a reduced price, but transfer, with the sale, a proportionally larger portion of his tax liability than was originally assessed on the parcel of land being sold. Conversely, he could purchase a large parcel of land from his neighbor at a premium price, but allow only a minuscule portion of the original land tax to be transferred with the sale. After a series of such maneuvers some landowners ended up paying only nominal taxes on large amounts of land, thus circumventing the tax-collecting power of the imperial government. No reliable statistics on the conditions of land tenure and tenancy rates under the Ming are available. The information in district gazetteers, local tax regulations, memorials, and private accounts, does not support the popular theory that the concentration of landholdings in the hands of great landlords had reached a high point. Huge estates of over 10,000 *mu* were extremely exceptional. Even large landholdings of over 2,000 *mu* were limited to a handful of families in each county. Medium-grade landowners, whose holdings ranged from 100 to 500 *mu*, were more numerous. In the mid-seventeenth century, when the concentration of landholdings in the Yangtze delta had become quite pronounced, there were still countless small landowners who owned only 3 to 5 *mu*. Yet, there can be no doubt that the marginal landowners were operating under the double squeeze of taxation and usury. Extant deeds of sale, mortgage agreements, and property registration papers further attest that the exploitation of small-scale farmers was carried out in large and small measure at all levels of society.¹⁴ Some landlords and holders of mortgage interests had about the same social and economic status as their tenants and debtors. Such practices as share-cropping, the reservation of certain rights to a property by the original owners after the transfer of title, and joint ownership, in which one owner derived a fixed annuity income from a property while the other paid the taxes on it, were common. The cumulative effect of these practices, which were widespread, far outweighed the results

¹⁴ See Wei Ch'ing-yuan, *Ming tai Huang ts' e Chib tu* (Peking, 1965), plates 6–8. Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch'ing nung ts'un she hui ching chi* (Peking, 1961), pp. 11–13, 22–33.

of the existence of a few very large landowners. As a result, a small amount of income from the available agricultural land was spread over a large part of the farming population: a situation which reduced each person's share of the produce to the minimum, regardless of who the taxpayer was. Given these circumstances, tax rates were exceedingly difficult to readjust. The Ming system of taxation was structured with the income of marginal landowners in mind; yet, the government did not attempt to foster the well-being of small landholders nor protect them from exploitation. Lacking effective control over the rural areas, the government could not rationally apportion the tax burden among those cultivating the land. Furthermore, the use of silver, the hardest currency of all, in business transactions, made credit difficult for farmers to secure and enhanced the opportunities for usury.

Public lands gradually disappeared from the tax registers during the sixteenth century. These lands too could be bought and sold. The obligation to pay the rent due the government, an obligation similar to a tax liability, was transferred along with private deeds of sale. This liability was not proportionally transferred: some lands carried little or no liability, some lands carried liability far in excess of the original tax or rent. Consequently, some owners bore heavy tax or rent obligations, whereas others bore almost none. In 1547, the prefect of Chia-hsing in Chekiang province boldly suggested that all the official land in his district be written off: that all registered land be regarded as privately owned, and that the rents due to the government from official lands be re-apportioned among all taxpayers as part of the land tax quota for the entire district. How this proposal came to be approved may never be known. It seems that the imperial government finally conceded the fact that the official lands were no longer under imperial control. As long as local administrators collected the same amount of revenue from it, the government considered its ownership of official land unnecessary. Immediately after this practice was put into effect in Chia-hsing prefecture, it spread to other districts of the Southern Metropolitan Region.¹⁵ By the end of the sixteenth century, with the exception of some small plots that supported educational institutions, all official lands in the southern provinces had been permanently written off. In most provinces, the amount of the official land to be written off was not large enough to make the increased assessment resulting from this change significant for individual taxpayers. An exception was the Southern Metropolitan region. Here, owing to the confiscation of land under the first Ming emperor, official lands accounted for a disproportionately large amount of the arable land. Even though the rents on official lands had been drastically reduced by governor Chou Sheng in the fifteenth

15 Ku Yen-wu, *Jib chib lu chi shib* (*Wan-yu Wen-ke'u*, ed.), 4, p. 53.

century, the subsequent abolition of the tax category of official lands nonetheless placed a significant financial burden on the general populace of that region. The land tax rates in these four prefectures were the highest in the empire; by the same token, tax delinquency also remained a perennial problem in these districts.

The creation of palace estates, estates for the nobility, and pasture lands controlled by the imperial stable and the imperial zoo added to the complexity of tax administration, but did not seriously effect the revenues of the empire. Such estates were created from the so-called "titleless land" (*pai-ti*) in north China. In order to encourage reclamation in the northern provinces, the first Ming emperor had declared that lands brought under cultivation after regional tax quotas had been set would remain forever tax-exempt. In the fifteenth century, such properties, along with undeveloped lands, were encroached upon by eunuchs, princes, and imperial relatives. Without proper deeds of title, some of the owners of tax exempt properties were gradually reduced to the status of renters. The revenue from a number of palace estates was earmarked for the expense accounts of several empresses dowager; these estates were also created from such titleless lands. As fixed under the emperor Shih-tsung in the mid-sixteenth century, the rent on established estates was in general 0.03 taels of silver per *mu*, a rate approximately equal to the land tax rates in the same districts. The proceeds were collected by the local magistrates and delivered to the designated titleholders. They represented a loss to the imperial treasury, but there is no indication that the amount involved ever exceeded 300,000 taels per annum.

The land tax was assessed in grain. The amount of grain collected as land tax dwarfed the amount of all other commodities collected as tax. There is a general misconception that the Ming government collected large amounts of hemp, cotton, cotton cloth, silk wadding, and silk fabrics in the form of surtaxes on the land tax. This misunderstanding arises from entries in several early works which state that the first Ming emperor ordered all landowners in the empire to set aside a certain portion of their arable land to plant these commodities; anyone who failed to do so was assessed with a punitive tax, payable only in textiles. Such a decree was indeed issued in 1365, several years before the founding of dynasty, and was reissued in 1368. But, by 1385, it had become clear that compulsory production could not be enforced, and the early decrees were rescinded.¹⁶ A silk surtax on the land tax was collected throughout the dynasty, but the total revenue thus collected was insignificant.

¹⁶ See *TMHT*, 17, p. 41b.

The silk and cotton goods that appear as items in Ming tax ledgers came from two sources. Part was collected as a portion of the land tax. Silk was collected in several prefectures of Chekiang and the Southern Metropolitan Region; cotton in Szechwan, Shensi, Shantung, and the Northern Metropolitan Region. Taxes in kind were assessed in areas that specialized in the production of certain goods or commodities. The quotas in kind assessed in such locales took the place of the usual assessment in grain. Another portion of these silk and cotton goods came from commutation of the grain tax. In certain districts, where the tax quotas had already been set in grain, portions of the tax consignments were made payable in other commodities owing to the difficulties and hardships surrounding the delivery of grain from these areas. Delivery fees were included in a district's grain tax quota. Hemp, however, was collected as a part of the fish duty, not as a part of the land taxes.

The only surtax on the land tax that was of some fiscal consequence was the tax in kind on hay. At sixteen bundles of hay on every 100 *mu* of taxable land, this tax on hay was collected in Shantung, Shansi, Shensi, Honan, and the Northern and Southern Metropolitan Regions. The cost of providing the hay and transporting it to a designated location placed a considerable financial burden on some taxpayers. By the late sixteenth century, the total value of hay collected by the government exceeded 600,000 taels of silver.

The commutation of grain quotas into silver was never systematized under the Ming. From the outset, the court issued ad hoc orders for commutation to solve immediate problems and gave little or no regard to commodity prices. After having been in effect for a long time, these commutation rates eventually became customary and unchangeable. By the sixteenth century, commutation could be authorized by fiscal officials at all echelons of the imperial administration. The principle was that any official with administrative jurisdiction over both a revenue collecting agency and a disbursing agency could fix the rate of commutation for the tax consignments that passed from the one to the other. For example, a governor could determine the rate of commutation for a consignment of grain derived from land taxes in districts under his jurisdiction which was delivered to the army units also under his jurisdiction. Since this supply procedure was completely decentralized, conversion rates set in different places, by different officials, at different levels of the imperial bureaucracies, at different times, and under different circumstances, modified the tax structure beyond recognition. Almost every district had a dozen or more rates of commutation in effect, sometimes ranging from 1.90 taels of silver per picul of grain to 0.25 taels per picul. In addition to fluctuations in calculating service charges, regional and seasonal price fluctuations made any effort to integrate or homogenize the rates of commutation virtually impossible. In fact, no such undertaking was ever attempted during the Ming Dynasty. The picul of

TABLE 2.1

Estimated land tax appropriation, as of 1578 (unit: picul (shih) of grain)

Item	Quantity
Retained in the provinces and metropolitan areas	11,700,000
Delivered to the northern defense areas by taxpayers	3,300,000
Delivered to Nanking	1,500,000
Delivered to Peking, of which components were	9,534,000
in grain at imperial granaries ("tribute grain")	(4,000,000)
in high grade grain for palace consumption	(210,000)
in cotton cloth and other supplies, charged against grain quota	(900,000)
in Gold Floral silver, charged against grain quota	(4,050,000)
otherwise permanently commuted to silver	(370,000)
Miscellaneous and unaccounted for	566,000
	26,600,000

grain remained the standard measure for taxation throughout the Ming empire: only through this imaginary unit could all accounts be integrated. By the sixteenth century, however, the picul of grain as a fiscal measurement in the national accounts had no absolute value. Although silver was widely used in business transactions, the imperial government kept no integrated account of revenues in silver. The exact proportion of silver in each tax transaction had to be ascertained by investigating the distinctive supply procedures of some 1,200 fiscal units. Even the minister of revenue could only make vague estimates of the total annual revenues collected in silver.

An important concept was established in the early years of the dynasty: land taxes were equatable with food. The proceeds from the land were intended to be consumed by individuals or issued to them. This view of the land tax was maintained throughout the Ming period. Grain from the land tax was disbursed solely to pay salaries of officials, lesser functionaries, and army personnel, to provide stipends for the nobility, government students, and imperial clansmen (that is, all the male descendants of the dynastic founder who were supported by the state for life), and to provide famine relief and local charity. Aside from these uses, grain tax proceeds could only be employed to pay for local procurement orders and large-scale public works projects. Even then, the grain disbursed to pay such expenses was largely used to feed the workers at government manufactories and to feed *corvée* laborers: a use which, in principle, agreed with the early concept that what the land produced was food which was intended to be eaten.

In general, taxes were apportioned in terms of grain quotas and were more or less permanent. By the late sixteenth century, the total tax quota for the empire was fixed at about 26,600,000 piculs. We have reconstructed the general distribution as shown in Table 2.1.¹⁷

17 This reconstruction is based on *TMHT*, chapters 17, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, and 42. The accounts appearing in *Wan-li k'uai chi lu*, now available on microfilm, are basically identical.

Between 1570 and 1590, when Ming fiscal accounts remained relatively stable, the total revenue from the grain tax is estimated to have been about 21 million taels of silver. The accounts of the 175 districts examined indicate that, with the exception of only four prefectures in the Southern Metropolitan Region, where the tax rates ranged from 14 to 20 percent of the total harvest, even after partial absorption of the service levy and many other items, land taxes rarely exceeded 10 percent of each district's estimated grain production. In most counties the tax rates ranged between 5 and 10 percent.

The Service Levy

All ordinary governmental expenses, excluding those covered by the land taxes, were defrayed by the labor service levy or, as it was more simply known, the service levy (*i*). The service levy cannot be regarded simply as corvée labor. Manpower for such typical corvée labor projects as road maintenance and canal construction was requisitioned on an ad hoc basis and was never institutionalized. The service levy, on the other hand, covered a wide range of material and labor requisitions that were fixed on a permanent or semi-permanent basis.

The service levy, insofar as it was based on the concept of progressive taxation, differed from the land tax, which followed the principle of uniform taxation. The entire population was organized so that every 110 households formed one *li* or village community. Each community (*li*) was divided into ten *chia* ("tithing" – tenth), or sections consisting of ten households. The remaining ten households comprised those assessed as the most affluent and populous among the 110: each of these ten households, on a rotational basis, served a year's term once each decade as the community (*li*) chiefs. Likewise, each year a particular tenth (*chia*) of the community (*li*) was liable for service. Under the community (*li*) chief of the year, this tenth (*chia*) of the community (*li*) carried out the local tax collection and delivery, and answered all material and labor service requisitions on behalf of the entire community (*li*). The other units paid their regular taxes; but as far as labor service obligations were concerned, they were on the inactive list. Thus, each household was required to provide service obligations for their *chia* once every decade. At the end of each ten-year cycle, a new census was taken and the population and land holding data were compiled in the Yellow Books (*huang-ts'ue*). The ten-unit community (*li-chia*) was then reorganized to reflect the new census data.

Material requisitions demanded from the ten-unit communities (*li-chia*) were quite extensive. First, each local community had to supply local government offices with stationery, oil, charcoal, and candles. Military equipment

(including bows, arrows, swords, and winter uniforms) was also provided by these households. Almost every conceivable item supplied to the imperial palace was regularly delivered by the area where it was produced; such items included local delicacies and botanic and mineral drugs of the highest quality. The service levy also comprised a number of items that required payment in cash. Aside from requisitioning them from the communities (*li-chia*), local governments had no funds for banquets to entertain visiting dignitaries, or even to escort or execute prisoners. These costs, as well as expenses incurred for local travel, construction, furnishings, the repair of official buildings, and subsidies for local candidates taking the civil service examinations were all borne by the community (*li-chia*), which remained the only regular source of revenue at the local level.

Government offices at all echelons of the imperial government, from the capital down to the county government, had only a skeletal staff of salaried officials. People who would be paid government employees today were conscripted from local communities and were not paid for their services by the government. Such people served as orderlies, guards, warehouse receiving men, operators of canal gates, grooms at government stables, and patrolmen at local business tax stations. Imperial postal stations, nominally under the jurisdiction of Ministry of War, were spaced throughout the empire. They, too, were not supported by public funds. The local community (*li-chia*) supplied postal stations with horses, sedan chairs, and boats. Upon showing passes issued by the Ministry of War, traveling officials could demand that postal stations provide them with food, drink, accommodation, and transportation. All these services were furnished by the local community (*li-chia*) units. To have taxes delivered, wealthy households were appointed as tax captains (*liang-chang*) outside the community (*li-chia*) system. Tax captains were responsible for consolidating local tax payments and organizing transportation to a specified granary. While tax captains were generally responsible for the fiscal obligations of the community (*li-chia*), the supply of porters and bookkeepers, preliminary tax collection within the villages, and a share of transportation costs were obligations borne by the community (*li-chia*). After 1494, the militia became established as an imperial institution, and the supply of militiamen and their logistical support became an additional service obligation of the community (*li-chia*) households.

The tax unit on which the service levy was based was the *ting*, or able-bodied male. The actual classification scheme, however, was fraught with complexity. The service levy was not, in fact, assessed on individuals, but on households. It was not entirely a poll tax; it always carried some force as a property tax. Unpaid labor service constituted only a part of the service levy; it also required the submission of materials and funds. Furthermore,

some job assignments with the government were not only unpaid, but also encumbered with fiscal responsibilities. For instance, measurers were held accountable for shortages in government granaries and the attendants at postal stations had a virtually unlimited obligation to provide hostel service to traveling officials whose numbers depended on how many passes had been issued by the Ministry of War. So-called doormen in Ming times, for example, were actually building superintendents who personally had to pay for ordinary building maintenance. During the sixteenth century, even the patrolmen were assigned seized contraband quotas that they were required to fulfill: the quotas had been counted as budgeted income of the revenue offices. The point is that, under T'ai-tsu's system, no office had an operating budget paid by the central government. All administrative expenses were defrayed by the local population. The entire process of appropriating funds, accounting for them, and disbursing them for this level of government was omitted: the service levy was expected to fill in the fiscal gap that had been deliberately left open at the bottom of the Ming system of government finance.

To fill the service levy, individual households were classified as upper, middle, and lower grade households. This classification scheme was based, in part, on the numbers of able-bodied males (*ting*) in the household and, in part, on the amount of property held by the household. Once the classification had been made, the government simply handed out requisition orders, leaving the details of the apportionment of material and labor service to the community (*li-chia*) units.¹⁸ The system functioned satisfactorily during the early years of the dynasty because the government operated in an atmosphere of puritanical austerity. The requisitions were not substantial and the assessment for able-bodied males (*ting*) and the household grading generally reflected economic reality. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, the conditions assuring the success of this system had all but vanished; the community (*li-chia*) system was under pressure. The gradually increasing use of silver instead of personal services as the means of fulfilling the service obligation also compromised the original organization.

The first general revision of the labor service levy was the introduction of the *chün-yao* (equitable service) system in 1443,¹⁹ which finally received imper-

18 For the early operation of the *li-chia*, see *MSL*, *Ying-tsung shih-lu*, 281, p. 6032; *MSL*, *Hsien-tsung shih-lu*, 33, p. 650; and Yamane Yukio, *Mindai yōeki seido no tenkai* (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 55–58.

19 Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido no tenkai*, pp. 104–05. Heinz Frieze, *Das Dienstleistungs-System der Ming Zeit, 1368–1644* (Hamburg, 1959), pp. 94–97. For the early origin of the *chün-yao* method, see *MSL*, *Ying-tsung shih-lu*, 120, p. 2425; 148, p. 4202; 152, p. 2975; 281, pp. 6031–32.

The description by Liang Fang-chung in *The Single-Whip Method of Taxation in China*, trans. Wang Yü-ch'uan (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 4–5 is inadequate.

ial approval and was extended to all districts in 1488. With it, the ten-year labor service cycle was split into two five-year cycles. Still operating under the community (*li-chia*) system, each year a local community called on one-tenth of its households to provide the material requisitions demanded of it and another tenth of its households to provide the labor service. Households were now classified into nine sub-grades, running from upper-upper to lower-lower. The required labor service assignments were published by the local magistrates, each assignment being accompanied by a declaration of one of the nine grades that reflected the financial burden of that assignment. In principle, the household grading and labor service grading was supposed to correspond with each other when the villagers were called to service. Thus, this tax apportionment was in some degree under governmental control. For each individual household, the previous nine-year lapse between service cycles was reduced to the shorter respite of four years.

Further revisions of the procedure during the sixteenth century were carried out as part of the general consolidation of fiscal accounts known as the single whip reform. Through a series of procedural changes, the service levy was partially and gradually separated from the community (*li-chia*) system. For the most part, the labor service levy was eliminated. All households were still obligated to fill demands for labor services on an annual basis. Whenever possible, both material requisitions and labor services were made payable in silver. A significant portion of the financial obligation was transferred from the households to the land surtax on the existing land tax. The remaining payments were collected from the *ting* as a part of the tax on their households. In the southern provinces, able-bodied males (*ting*) were no longer graded, and thus the principle of progressive taxation previously in effect was negated. Owing to many obstacles in the fiscal system, no district abolished the community (*li-chia*) system altogether, and no district completely eliminated the able-bodied male (*ting*) as a fiscal unit. Taxes in kind were also far from being discontinued. Despite the general demand to terminate the drafting of villagers to perform unpaid labor services, the practice persisted. In north China, even after the implementation of the single whip reform during the sixteenth century, a large number of districts still retained the graded able-bodied males (*ting*) and graded household system of taxation. In other words, the taxation system remained fundamentally unchanged from the pattern set down by the first Ming emperor in the fourteenth century.

The portion of the service levy transferred to the land tax also varied widely from district to district. In several prefectures in the Yangtze delta, because the land tax accounts were large, the absorption of a substantial portion of the service levy into those accounts was a rather simple matter. In a number

of counties, the amount of the labor service levy absorbed into the land tax could be as high as 90 percent, leaving only 10 percent of the labor service obligatory to able-bodied males (*ting*).²⁰ Such percentages can be misleading. In fact, the greater portion of the land taxes in those districts was collected in kind. Each county still conscripted squads of tax agents to handle all the local collection and some of the distant deliveries. The administrative expenses and handling charges of these items, which were quite high, were never adequately covered by the labor service levy accounts, but had to be paid by the draftees and the general population. The highest percentage of the service levy absorbed by the land taxes was about 70 percent in the southern provinces and 50 percent in the northern provinces.

In the late sixteenth century, few counties had a service levy account of less than 3,000 taels of silver, and a few counties in the southern provinces had no less than 7,000 taels on account. Taking the accounts of 35 counties in seven different provinces as a sample, it appears that, on average, a county collected 9,724.26 taels of silver in lieu of the labor service levy, which sum included portions of funds derived from surtaxes on the land tax.²¹ It seems that the commutation of the service levy throughout the empire should have yielded total revenues in the vicinity of 10 million taels of silver. At least half of this amount was collected as surtaxes on the land tax.

The total value of the land tax, estimated at 21 million taels of silver, does not include this commuted labor service levy. However, the estimated percentages given here of agricultural production taken in taxes take into account the commutation of the labor service levy into the land tax.

At first glance, it would seem that the funds collected should have been more than ample to cover a county's operating expenses. The fact was, however, that although a seemingly large amount was collected from a county, not all the tax collected was spent within that county. Out of the taxes collected by a county, disbursements had to be made to the imperial government and palace, and to all the intermediate level government offices and service agencies. An average county also spent almost 2000 taels a year to support the imperial postal system within its jurisdiction.²² In the south eastern provinces, where collections from the service levy were highest, the largest item of expense was the cost of maintaining the militia and the regional armed forces: an amount frequently exceeding 25 percent of the total income. As a consequence, most county governments had insufficient funds remaining for their own operating expenses: sometimes only a meagre 300 to 500 taels.

²⁰ Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population*, p. 29.

²¹ The tabulation appears in Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century Ming China* (Cambridge, 1974), tables 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8.

²² Su T'ung-pin, *Ming-tai i ti Chih tu* (Taipei, 1969), p. 439.

The salt monopoly

Strictly speaking, the salt monopoly was not a single monopoly, but consisted of a dozen or more monopolies operating on a non-competitive basis. Following a system established under previous dynasties, the government designated a number of mutually exclusive areas for salt distribution, each supported by a different production center. Carrying salt across the boundaries of these areas was declared a felony.

The success of the monopoly depended on the control of the labor force which produced the salt. Officially registered saltern households retained this status in perpetuity: in theory, their members could change neither their profession nor place of residence. The able-bodied males in saltern households were assessed as salt-producing men (*ting*). During the early years of the dynasty, the general quota set by the central government demanded that each able-bodied man (*ting*) turn in 3,200 catties of salt per year.²³ For every 400 catties of salt, the government awarded the producer one picul of husked rice.

The operating agencies of the salt monopoly had no transportation facilities for salt distribution. Their stocks of salt were either sold to wholesale dealers or bartered for grain that the salt merchants were to deliver to frontier army posts. In either case, the merchants had to go to the production center to receive their salt. This bartering method was called *k'ai-chung*, and was a practice developed during the Sung.

Compared with the way previous dynasties managed the salt monopoly, however, the Ming administration clearly showed degenerative tendencies. Ming salt administrators themselves acknowledged this tendency. The great difference between the Ming system and earlier systems was that, under the Ming, the salt monopoly system was expected to surrender its entire income to the imperial treasury: a requirement which left it without funds to finance its own operations.

After paper currency was put in circulation late in the fourteenth century, the government began to substitute paper notes for the grain payments due to the saltern households. This paper currency was soon devalued and later became worthless. At that point, paper money subsidies to the salt producers stopped. Thereafter, salt collection by the government took the form of a poll tax. In most salt producing areas, the number of saltern households dwindled, although, in reality, production increased steadily to keep pace with population growth. Large amounts of salt were sold on the black market. Recognizing the inadequacy of the salt administration, in the fifteenth

23 Actually there were many variations. See *TMHT*, 34, p. 1b.

century, the government authorized salt producers to sell their surplus salt (*yü-yen*) to licensed merchants. From these merchants, the salt distribution centers collected an excise tax. The result was that the bulk of the salt was siphoned into this new outlet, leaving the quota for salt, which the registered saltern households were obligated to deliver to the government as a poll tax, in arrears. At the same time, rather than declining, contraband traffic thrived.

The government had a tendency not to fulfill its obligations in its dealings with salt merchants. After delivering grain at frontier posts, salt merchants often found the production centers had no salt on hand with which to make payment for the grain they had delivered. In 1429, there were already a number of promissory notes issued prior to 1402 which still had not been redeemed with salt.²⁴ In 1440, the annual salt production was formally divided into two categories: 80 percent was called regular stock (*ch'ang ku yen*); the remaining 20 percent was called reserve stock (*ts'un chi yen*). The regular stock was kept in normal circulation and the reserve stock kept for such emergencies as urgent military demands. Since, however, the government rarely had a reserve of salt, the new arrangement only provided a means whereby the salt monopoly could be used for deficit financing. No sooner had this system of classification been created than the reserve stock was also made available for bartering, even though the purchasers of the regular stock were waiting for their supplies. Since the reserve stock was immediately available, it appeared more attractive to salt merchants and immediately became an attractive investment. In 1449, the court further expanded the reserve stock to 60 percent, reducing the regular stock to 40 percent of the production. Not long after, delays in delivery became common in both categories. A salt control censor touring the Liang-Che region reported that, in 1471, even the reserve stock was ten years in arrears.²⁵

In this situation, the government, in its administration of the salt monopoly, had to deal with three factors that worked against one another. When the government delayed deliveries of salt, merchants had to add the interest on their frozen capital to the retail prices of salt, driving salt prices up. When the price of salt soared, contraband dealing became more profitable. To diminish contraband sales, the government was then forced to reduce the price of salt and the bartering rates in order to compete with the price of contraband salt. This, however, lessened the revenue the government realized. During the early sixteenth century, contraband dealing in salt became so firmly established in certain geographical regions that it ultimately drove government salt out of the marketplace. By the middle of the century, both the Ministry of Revenue

24 MSL, *Hsüan-tsung Shib-lu*, 55, p. 1313.

25 MSL, *Hsien-tsung Shib-lu*, 87, p. 1698.

and censorial officials estimated that more than three-quarters of the salt produced in the Liang-Huai region fell into the hands of contraband dealers.²⁶

Under an arrangement reached in 1535, salt production in the four areas under the control of the central government was to be bartered to defray the cost of provisions for soldiers serving in garrisons along the northern frontier. Upon producing the granary receipts issued by the frontier governors, salt merchants were entitled to draw a prescribed amount of salt at a designated production center. The amount was withdrawn from the regular stock collected under the tax system. Before the merchants departed from the restricted area given over to salt production, however, they were also required to purchase a specific amount of surplus salt, on which an excise tax was collected. No one could deal with the salt producers without first bartering with the government, nor could merchants enter into barter agreements without a private purchase. In fact, the two kinds of salt had to be packed into the same bag before clearing the checking stations. By continuing the barter system, the government hoped to force salt merchants to maintain agricultural colonies in the frontier region. It was hoped that the production of such agricultural colonies would stabilize grain prices even though this policy had not been effective in earlier periods. The authorization of private sales provided a legitimate outlet for surplus salt; the combined packing assured the delivery of tax salt as a poll tax.²⁷ This procedure continued unchanged to the end of the dynasty.

In response to the governmental regulations, salt merchants also made some readjustments. By the late fifteenth century, frontier traders no longer dealt in salt. After delivering grain to border army posts, they sold their granary receipts to merchants who resided in or near the salt-producing areas. By the sixteenth century, these local merchants had also ceased to distribute salt to inland markets. They operated somewhat like financiers and export agents. Once their salt had cleared a checking station at the perimeter of a salt-producing area, it was sold to a group of inland distributors.²⁸ Such commercial specialization had become necessary because, under normal conditions, it still required a period of three years, from the time the bartered grain was delivered to the day the salt was released, to complete one transaction. Sometimes the process could drag on for ten years. Only by committing large amounts

²⁶ See Chu T'ing-li, *Yencheng chib* (1529; Hishi copy of the original, made by Takeo Hiraoka, 1969), 7, p. 50. *MSL*, *Shih-tsung shih-lu*, 358, p. 6420; 368, p. 6575; *Huang-Ming ching shih wen pien*, eds. Ch'en Tzu-lung and Hsü Fu-yüan (1638; rpt. Taipei, 1964), 475, p. 111b.

²⁷ See *MSL*, *Shih-tsung Shih-lu*, 175, p. 3793; *TMHT*, 34, pp. 12a–b.

²⁸ Fujii Hiroshi, "Mindai enshō no ichikōsatsu," *Shigaku zasshi*, 54, No. 5 (1943), pp. 62–111; 54, No. 6 (1943), pp. 65–104; 54, No. 7 (1943), pp. 17–59.

of capital and by carrying on the trade in a continuous operation could the business be made profitable. The technical details of securing surplus salt from registered saltern households and of meeting official requirements also required the constant attention of the local salt merchants. As it developed, the system worked to the benefit of some local merchants. They became speculators. After having purchased granary receipts from frontier merchants at prices below their face value when no other buyers were on hand, they bribed the salt administrators to advance the release date of their stock, and sometimes, even bribed them to delay the delivery date for other merchants, so that they could reap enormous profits.

The mechanism of the monopoly system was so complicated that whenever there was a serious imbalance in it, the whole operation broke down. At times, the frontier army posts were unable to attract a sufficient number of merchants to meet their demand for grain supplies. At times, the retail prices in the inland market were too low for the distributors to make a profit, owing to the presence of contraband salt. Most of the time, the problem was that the salt administration could not collect enough salt from registered saltern households to meet its own quotas. There were even times when merchants, having invested large amounts of capital in salt vouchers without having received any salt, were unable to raise the additional cash needed to pay the excise tax. Often, though there was an acute shortage of salt in the inland provinces, huge stocks of salt remained impounded and immobile at checking stations and could not be released.

Under normal conditions, each distribution commission was responsible for obtaining a fixed quota of salt. Generally, the sale price and rates of exchange remained unchanged throughout the sixteenth century and into the early seventeenth century. The revenue from salt was considered a regular annual item of income and appropriated in advance. During several wartime emergencies, the quotas were temporarily increased. Without exception, however, the initial increase in revenue was always followed by a sharp decline in subsequent years. Like the land tax, the salt revenue also had a fixed ceiling. It was restricted by the capacity of the marginal salt producers, the interest rates borne by the merchants, and the conditions of the contraband market. Deliveries were always two to three years behind schedule; and then, the officials in charge were not sure which year's backlog they were handling. They moved in and out of office, each having an immediate cash delivery quota to meet. Also, the priority in which the merchants were to receive salt was never put into effect. When there was a shortage in the current year's revenue, the officials forced the local salt merchants to loan them money under the guise of advance payments against the excise tax of future purchases.

In 1617, the advance payments extracted from local merchants had accumulated to the point at which, in the Liang-Huai region, the entire system became inoperable. A vice-director from the Ministry of Revenue, Yüan Shih-cheng, solved the problem by granting franchises to the local merchants. These merchants were organized into ten syndicates (*kang*), each responsible for an equal portion of the advance payment due to the government. Each year thereafter, nine of these syndicates were entitled to barter with the government for the current year's production using a combination of cash payments and current salt vouchers. The remaining syndicate divided a small amount of salt among its members as a token redemption of their cash advance to the government. This small amount of salt, however, was not derived from extra production, but obtained by discounting the weight of each bag of salt released to the other nine syndicates. In sum, it amounted to a forced cancellation of public debt, with the token amount used for the redemption paid by the creditors themselves. In return, the government awarded exclusive trading rights to these ten syndicates, theoretically in perpetuity.²⁹

The salt monopoly could be profitable. Based on our calculations, in 1600 it cost about three taels of silver to produce and deliver a short ton of salt in the Liang-Huai region. The government's revenue per short ton, including both the value of bartered grain and the excise tax, was close to 3.5 taels. By the time the local merchants handed over the same stock to the inland distributors, the minimum price for a short ton was nine taels. In inland ports, the retail price rarely fell below fifteen taels per short ton. At that price, a laborer had to spend four days' wages to purchase his annual quota of salt. When the monopoly system was in disarray, retail prices could soar to three or four times the normal level, as was the case in Hukwang during the 1610s.³⁰ On such occasions, this daily necessity was literally beyond the means of common people.

According to records of 1578, the salt quota for the empire, including surplus salt, stood in excess of 486 million catties, or somewhere close to 560,000 short tons. The total revenue, often referred to by administrators in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century as two million taels of silver, was to be disbursed only for the support of the armed forces. About half of this amount was first delivered to the Ministry of Revenue. Even though this sum was eventually forwarded to the northern army

29 The original proposal appears in *MSL*, v. 121, *Shen-tsung Shih-lu*, 563, p. 10607; 568, pp. 10687–88; *Huang-Ming ching shih wen pien*, 475, pp. 19–20; 477, pp. 1–5. It is summarized in Sun Ch'eng-tse, *Ch'ün ming meng yü lu*, 35, p. 46b. Also see Wada Sei, *Shokkashū yakuchū*, Vol. 1, p. 602.

30 *Huang-Ming ching shih wen pien*, 477, pp. 19a–b, 21b.

TABLE 2.2

Estimated annual income of the salt monopoly, ca. 1570–80 (unit: tael of silver)

Income item	Amount
Delivered to the Ministry of Revenue, in silver	1,000,000
Delivered by merchants to army posts, in bartered supplies, value	500,000
Delivered by salt distribution agencies to army posts, in silver	220,000
Intercepted by southern provinces for local defense, in silver	280,000
Total	2,000,000

posts, the ministry wished to maintain control of this cash income for purposes of flexibility in distribution. The breakdown of this income is shown in Table 2.2.³¹

This total is even smaller than the revenue derived from the same source under the T'ang dynasty in the early ninth century, which preceded the period under discussion by 800 years. The T'ang government used the income to expand trade.³² The Ming administration virtually spent the revenue before it was collected. Furthermore, since the revenue offices were constantly in debt, the monopoly tended to encourage and support high interest rates. This financial burden ultimately was passed on in the price of salt to the consumers as a form of indirect taxation.

Miscellaneous incomes

All revenues other than the land tax, the service levy, and the salt revenue can be classified as miscellaneous incomes. No complete list of these items has ever appeared. At least twenty-six items of miscellaneous income can be found in the various fiscal accounts of the period. None of them had an annual quota substantially in excess of 500,000 taels of silver.

One category of miscellaneous income was comprised of revenues derived from industrial and commercial sources. These included the inland customs duty (annual quota: 343,729 taels), the local business tax (150,000 taels), the maritime tariff (90,000 taels), income from government mining (150,000 taels), and the fish duty (58,000 taels). Another category consisted of incomes from administrative sources, including the proceeds from the sale of rank (maximum annual quota: 510,000 taels in 1565), license fees for Buddhist

31 This is summarized in *TMHT*, chapters 32 and 33; *MSL*, *Mu-tsung shih-lu*, 32, pp. 850–51; *MSL*, *Shen-tsung shih-lu*, 24, p. 624; 34, p. 792; *Huang Ming ching shih wen pien*, 474, p. 1b.

32 See Denis C. Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 90–96.

monks and Taoist priests (200,000 taels), and the commutation of punishments and fines (300,000 taels). A third category consisted of revenues derived from commuting services and supplies. Most outstanding in this category was the expense account of the Ministry of Works, collected from all counties and prefectures except those in Kwangsi, Yunnan and Kweichow (annual quota after 1556: 500,000 taels). Next came the income from commutation of stable services, which was collected by the Ministry of War (370,000 taels in 1588). Another item, which does not fall into any of the categories mentioned, was the income from the tea and horse trade. The excise tax on tea in Shensi was collected in kind and exchanged for horses with Turkish and Tibetan-speaking peoples on the northwestern frontier. It was a kind of non-cash income. In the 1570s and 1580s, about 10,000 horses were obtained annually in this manner.³³ The excise tax on tea had a monetary value of 100,000 taels. This enumeration covers the noteworthy items in the category of miscellaneous incomes.

The lack of stable sources of income in this list is obvious. Revenues from industrial and commercial sources were neglected, with a paucity of revenues from maritime tariffs and government mining as a consequence. In part, the origin of this negligence can be traced to the founding of the dynasty. Foreign trade and industrial mining previously never had been considered essential elements of public finance. The emphasis on agricultural income and regional self-sufficiency, once established, could not be easily modified. The governmental structure, the prevailing ideology, and technical difficulties, all prevented any drastic reorientation of fiscal arrangements. The poor performance of the inland customs houses provides an example of this problem.

Inland custom duty stations were located in Soochow, Yangchou, Huai-an, Lin-ch'ing, Ho-hsi-wu, the Ch'ung-wen gate of Peking, and Chiu-chiang. With the exception of the last station, all were situated on the Grand Canal. Each station operated separately having its own annual collection quota to meet. No official, in or outside the imperial bureaucracy, had a career or professional interest in the long-term development of the inland customs. Provincial officials cooperating with the custom officers considered inland customs collection an unrewarding financial burden on their own districts. Moreover, when the quota system was in effect, the bureaucrats were most reluctant to disturb the status quo. While an official who had failed to meet

33 See Huang, *Taxation and government finance in sixteenth-century Ming China*, pp. 257–61. This is based on *MSL*, *Shih-tsung shih-lu*, 188, p. 3968; *Huang-Ming ching shih wen pien*, 386, p. 16b; and Ku Yen-wu, *T'ien hsia chün kuo li ping shu* (1662), rpt. *Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'ao* (Shanghai, 1936), 18, p. 86. Cf. Morris Rosabi, "The tea and horse trade with Inner Asia during the Ming dynasty," *Journal of Asian History*, 4, No. 2 (1970), pp. 159, 163.

the quota might jeopardize his career, those who produced surpluses were regarded with disfavor by their fellow officials. Under the Ming, no official won public acclaim for increasing state revenues.

The inland customs stations lacked operating budgets, and the proceeds from the duties were never allocated to expand their activities. Customs offices were supported by the same kind of labor service levy on the community (*li-chia*) households that supported other governmental agencies. All the scribes and patrolmen were drafted from the local population and expected by the government to work without pay. Even with the tariff rates as low as they were, there was no effective way to prevent bribery and extortion. The officials in charge of the collection made no distinction between the major commodities transported in bulk and peddlery. All merchandise was required to be enumerated in detail in customs declarations: not infrequently, such declarations might consist of 3,000 items. Cargo destined for long-distance delivery was repeatedly inspected and assessed. Fines were stiff. Wealthy merchants were “persuaded” to make “voluntary contributions.” They also had to compete with the ships of eunuchs and the military on the Grand Canal. These ships also carried private cargo for profit.

Some of the means of obtaining miscellaneous income, institutionalized during the early years of the dynasty were never systematically reorganized thereafter, when delivery procedures deteriorated. The fish duty was originally collected from fishermen. Taxable items included fish glue, hemp, copper, varnish, t’ung oil, and vermillion. The rationale behind including materials needed for shipbuilding in the list was that fishermen owned boats and hence could be asked to contribute such articles to the government. Yet, by the sixteenth century, many districts had lost control over the peripatetic fishermen; others found the amounts involved too small to warrant separate collection. They simply added the fish duty accounts to the districts’ land tax quotas. The remaining fish duty stations, either at the prefectural or at the county level, collected what they could in kind or cash. The proceeds, in grain, silver, shipbuilding materials, and copper coins, were sorted and delivered to the Ministry of Revenue, the Ministry of Works, the Nanking Ministry of Revenue, and the Kuang-hui Treasury inside the palace. A rough estimate of the total income puts it in the vicinity of 58,000 taels each year. Most counties had a quota of less than 100 taels, and, in some special cases, of less than five taels.

Nominally, the forest levy was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works. The fifteen stations, however, in no sense operated as part of a uniform system. Those in the frontier region were actually controlled by the army. Those near Peking were supervised by the eunuchs; they collected wooden boards and logs for the palace. Only five stations on the major waterways

in the south had some fiscal significance. Among them four (namely Huai-an, Sha-shih, Wu-hu, and Hang-chou) collected payments in silver: the proceeds being delivered to the government dockyards. The remaining station, near Nanking, collected payments in kind; the lumber goods were sent to a factory in the southern capital that manufactured palace furniture. Piecemeal accounts still extant suggest that, by the late sixteenth century, the total annual proceeds from the forest levy in cash and in kind had a total value close to 100,000 taels.

The local business tax, store franchise fees, excises on wine and vinegar, the stamp tax on real estate transfers, and payments for rationed salt (a tax similar to the fish duty), were all nuisance taxes. The regional quotas for these taxes were fixed in paper currency during the early years of the dynasty and were never revised over the course of the next two centuries. In many districts the amounts collected, when converted to silver according to the sixteenth-century rates determined by the imperial government, shrank to minuscule proportions. Yet, the proceeds were still split between the central government and the local government. Typical of such nuisance taxes was the payment for rationed salt. When the payment was instituted in the early fifteenth century, its primary purpose was not to create a new source of revenue, but to give the paper currency a new lease on life. The government expected that each adult would be rationed one catty of salt each month upon paying one *kuan* of paper notes – and the payment had to be made in paper notes. Eventually, no salt was even distributed, but the collection continued: the tax was converted to a payment in silver and became, in effect, a small-scale poll tax.

Some of the miscellaneous items of income should not have appeared in the treasury's report. They should have been handled as petty cash items or as the receivables of service agencies. But the Ming accounting system was so complex, it was unable to integrate those items in any other way. The reeds tax was collected on the banks of islands in the Yangtze river. Incense fees were collected from worshippers at national shrines. The "common post money" was derived from a deduction made in the salary of the cavalry soldiers. Similar to group insurance premiums, this sinking fund was supposed to provide compensation for the incidental deaths of service horses. The "speed-the-delivery money" was an account comprised of the surplus from transportation surcharges on tribute grain, which had been collected from the taxpayers but intercepted by the army transportation corps. Four separate accounts covered the commutation of services rendered by palace artisans, soldiers in north China rotated to service in the capital, personal attendants serving capital officials, and savings from the postal service. Two separate accounts covered the calendar paper that was delivered to the Imperial Astro-nomic Service and the kitchen service materials that were provided for the Court of Imperial Entertainments.

If all twenty-six items of miscellaneous tax were collected, the category of miscellaneous income could have provided 3,780,000 taels of silver each year by the late sixteenth century. More likely, however, the annual revenue was well below 3 million taels. The receivables were divided into numerous packages and delivered to dozens of disbursing agencies. The amount submitted to the Ministry of Revenue fluctuated between 850,000 taels and 360,000 taels in the sixteenth century.³⁴

READJUSTMENTS IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY AND THE FINAL COLLAPSE

Major administrative problems

During the sixteenth century, the fiscal administration faced numerous intractable problems. One was the lack of an adequate monetary system. The failure of the paper currency in the early Ming has been recognized by historians; but the subsequent failure to provide a remedy for the situation has received little notice. The use of unminted silver in tax transactions, which began informally in the fifteenth century, was far from an ideal arrangement, having been mainly an unplanned and uncontrolled response to the failure of the paper currency.

At first reluctant to create a supply of money that would compete with its own legal tender, the Ming court persistently refused to undertake the minting of copper coins. From 1433, for a period of seventy years, no coins were minted.³⁵ The government intermittently proscribed the use of metallic currency until 1448. The populace, therefore, resorted to using coins minted under previous dynasties; counterfeit money was common. Only in 1503 did the court put the imperial mint back into operation. The amount of coinage, however, was inadequate. The administrators had no perception of the magnitude of the problem. The mint was inadequately financed. Both the materials and the labor needed were requisitioned. Quality control was lax; workmanship was poor. This situation only encouraged counterfeiting. The chaos of the monetary system restrained commerce and caused the rise of food prices and unemployment. Unable to extricate himself from this situation, at the advice of grand-secretary Hsü Chieh in 1564, the Chia-ching emperor abandoned the minting of copper coins altogether and decided instead to promote the use of silver, which had already become a popular medium of exchange, despite the governments' efforts to prohibit its use.

34 *Cb'un ming mengyü lu*, 35, pp. 8a-10b has an account of 1580. For more details about those incomes, see *Taxation and governmental finance*, Chapter 6.

35 P'eng Hsin-wei, *Chung-kuo huo pi shih*, Vol. 2 (Shanghai, 1954), pp. 425, 437.

Thereafter, the mint turned out small quantities of coin occasionally when the rate of exchange was profitable, but no further effort was made to produce an imperial currency.

The disadvantage of using silver as a common medium of exchange in the sixteenth century was that the money supply was very restricted. Because the tax deadline followed the harvest, farm prices were adversely affected by demanding payment in silver. Tax collection and revenue delivery further withdrew a sizeable amount of silver from normal circulation, thus fostering high interest rates and causing distress to the peasants. At the same time, the government completely lost the control over money and credit. It must be stressed that, under this fiscal arrangement, no office had revolving funds on hand or the authority to manipulate the money supply. Even the development of private financial institutions was retarded. Until 1600, private parties active in the credit market were limited to using pawn shops³⁶

Even though tax rates under the Ming were generally low, assessments were computed on the basis of minute gradations. When stated in terms of a precious metal, the payment involved extremely fine fractional distinctions, often carried to hundreds or thousandths of an ounce of silver. The imposition of surcharges and conversion of commodities exacerbated the complexity of this situation. As a typical example, in the late sixteenth century Chia-ting county in the Southern Metropolitan region called for a labor service payment of 0.0147445814487 taels of silver on each picul of grain in basic land tax assessment. Since, in practice, no taxpayer had a basic assessment in an integral number of piculs, the number of digits in a complex tax computation could be considerably greater. This tax procedure only provided a paradise for lower-echelon tax collectors and bookkeepers.

Support of the armed forces posed another problem. It has been thought that, under the early Ming emperors, the army attained a high degree of self-sufficiency. The extant evidence makes clear the fallacy of this claim. The reported acreages of land registered as military farms and the total proceeds recorded from these acreages are not merely inaccurate, they are impossible. Some of the statistical absurdities already had been exposed by Ming writers.³⁷ In 1965, Wang Yü-ch'üan, after conducting a collective research project on the military farming of the Ming, called the success claimed for it "exaggerated" and "without a factual basis."³⁸

While the precise details of army logistics in the early Ming cannot be ascertained, there is little doubt that a large part of the armies' supplies was derived

³⁶ See Lien-sheng Yang, *Money and Credit in China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), p. 82.

³⁷ *Ch'ün ming meng yu lü*, 36, p. 3.

³⁸ Wang Yü-ch'üan, *Ming tai ti chün tun* (Peking, 1965), pp. 104-05, 210-11.

from the land tax. During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the fiscal resources designated to support the armed forces were significantly reduced, not by legislation but by uncontrollable circumstances. After the T'u-mu incident in 1449, most frontier posts called the soldiers on farming duty to active service. The land they left was rented to civilian cultivators at reduced rates. In the interior, the land originally assigned to the soldiers was sold and mortgaged by them. Acreages allocated to the military colonies suffered significant losses. By the mid-sixteenth century some districts retained only a third of the original allocation; some districts plainly acknowledged that there was no such land remaining and that the army units had to be supported entirely from tax revenue.

From the first years of the dynasty, a substantial portion of the retained revenue derived from the land taxes in the interior provinces was disbursed to support the army. All other regular expenditures were insignificant by comparison. In the sixteenth century, however, the situation changed considerably. In North China, a greater portion of the revenue had to be diverted to provide stipends for members of the imperial clan. The policy of supporting, for life, all the direct descendants of the dynastic founder could be said to have been implemented without foresight. The first Ming emperor himself had twenty-six sons; Jen-tsung, nine; Ying-tsung, ten; and Hsien-tsung, fourteen. In 1492, Prince Ch'ing-ch'eng, one of the fifth-generation descendants of the first emperor, was reported to have produced ninety-four children. The imperial family proliferated at such a fantastic rate that, by 1502, all the retained revenues of Shansi and Honan provinces would have been insufficient to pay the stipends of the princes and imperial clansmen residing in those provinces.

In the southern provinces, owing to the diversion of retained revenue to capital and palace maintenance, the funds available to support the army also became inadequate. Chekiang reported in 1480 that the annual costs of supporting the soldiers in that province had exceeded all the retained revenues. Moreover, land tax during the Ming period was rarely collected in full, and no record of full collection has ever appeared. In the sixteenth century, collection of the land tax at 80 percent of the projected quota in a district would have been considered a notable achievement. Often, tax remissions were ordered, sometimes because of natural disasters, and at other times because of such auspicious occasions as imperial accessions and the births of emperors' first sons. Not infrequently, tax remissions were allowed in order to write off tax arrearages that had become uncollectable. These actions only increased budget deficits. Since actual income could seldom cover projected expenditures, higher offices constantly pressured lower echelons to deliver first those items essential to the administration at the top levels of government,

and paid scant attention to the actual conditions of the bottom levels. Transferred revenue was generally taken more seriously than the retained revenue. Customary practice, therefore, made some items in the permanent budget appear as what might now be called "hard appropriations" and others as "soft appropriations." When funds were insufficient, the "soft appropriations" could be discounted, left in arrears, or simply ignored. Soldiers' pay and the stipends of low-ranking imperial clansmen fell into the latter category.

The century after 1449 stands out as a period in Chinese history during which defense installations declined to a shocking degree. If the total retained portion of the land taxes, which appears in official accounts as close to 11.7 million piculs of grain, had been delivered in its entirety to the armed forces, the provinces might have been able to maintain a minimum degree of armament. The actual amount delivered, however, could not have comprised more than a small fraction of this projected annual revenue. (Local gazetteers, however, maintained that military expenditures took a high percentage of a districts' retained revenue, sometimes close to or exceeding 80 percent. Such figures must be considered "soft appropriations" that were never disbursed in full.) Even in the opening years of the sixteenth century, numerous guard units were staffed at less than 15 percent of their authorized strength; in many camps the number of soldiers on duty comprised less than 5 percent of the number there should have been. The minister of war openly admitted that eight soldiers out of ten had deserted. The emperor's decrees acknowledged that soldiers in many units had not been paid for years. Sources too numerous to be cited mention arrearages in army pay.³⁹

With the Mongol chieftains Jinong and Oosai making incursions on the northern frontier in the early part of the sixteenth century and Altan threatening Peking itself during the mid-century, the frontier commands had to strengthen their defensive positions. When the *wo-k'ou* (pirates or pirate-raiders) attacked the southern coastal provinces, the situation became even more desperate. In many districts a new army had to be hurriedly organized. The demand for financial support to carry out such emergency military programs was even more pressing.

A third problem lay in the inadequate budget for official salaries. The emoluments of government officials followed the schedule fixed by the first Ming emperor in 1392, which, theoretically, had never been revised since its implementation. Yet, throughout fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when revenue was insufficient, the government decreased the value of stipends paid in grain by converting them into payment in paper currency and commodities at unrea-

39 Ray Huang, "Military expenditures in sixteenth century Ming China," *Oriens Extremus*, 17, No. 1-2 (1970), pp. 39-62.

listically low exchange rates. The original schedule, which provided an annual payment of 1,044 piculs of grain for officials of the highest rank and sixty piculs for officials of the lowest rank, had not been generous to begin with. The conversion was virtually a default of payment. Officials in Peking received one picul of grain per month regardless of rank, in effect, a ration in kind. Then, 50 percent of the scheduled salaries for officials ranked 4b and above and smaller percentages of the lower-rank officials, were converted to payment in pepper, sapanwood, cotton cloth, silk fabrics, and sometimes even peas, confiscated garments, and salvaged materials. The real value of the converted portions of the salary never exceeded 20 percent of what the grain stipends had been worth; most of the time it fell below 5 percent of the salary's original value in grain. In the sixteenth century the government converted official salaries to payments in silver. But the portions of salaries that had already been converted to payment in commodities at discount prices were not reconverted to the original standard of payment in grain and then calculated at the prevailing food prices of grain, but were reckoned on the basis of the discounted commodities according to their market value. This new arrangement, in force until the end of the dynasty, allowed a prefect (ranked 4a) an annual salary of 62.05 taels of silver, on which it would have been difficult to sustain a small family. A county magistrate (ranked 7a) received an annual salary of 27.49 taels of silver, less than one day's food allowance for the emperor.⁴⁰ In the late sixteenth century, an elegant house in Peking could be mortgaged for 7,000 taels. A day laborer earned about one tael a month. With the general standard of living of the Ming bureaucrats in mind, it is probably safe to say that if all government positions had been totally unsalaried, it would have made very little difference. Salaries always appeared as an insignificant item in the government's expenses; but then, few officials actually lived on their salaries. The same statement holds true for lesser functionaries and for the eunuchs who were, like the civil servants, only slightly better than unsalaried.

None of the problems were resolved in Ming times. What the sixteenth-century administrators did was to make a series of readjustments to mitigate the seriousness of these problems as best they could.

Readjustments to the enlarged military expenditures

The increase in military expenditures during the sixteenth century was not unforeseen; it occurred for a number of reasons. In addition to the loss of revenues that resulted from the decline in military farming, the appearance of mercenaries along with *wei-so* regulars contributed significantly to the growth

40 For the salary schedule, see *TMHT*, 39, pp. 1a–7b.

in military expense. In the early sixteenth century, mercenaries had already begun to outnumber regular members of the *wei-so* garrisons in several northern frontier commands. Being mercenaries, the new personnel expected to be paid regularly. Until the middle of the century, six taels per man per year remained adequate. Thereafter, the wider use of silver and the expansion of the recruiting program pushed military wages steadily higher. Before the century ended, many recruits were paid eighteen taels a year – an amount that included a food allowance. This figure eventually became the standard rate of pay for soldiers during the seventeenth century. The purchase of cavalry horses, the widespread use of firearms, the construction of the great walls, and the development of new strategic commands contributed to the increase in military expenditures during the sixteenth century.

In the sixteenth century, there was only one instance noted in the records of a general surcharge on the land tax being levied in order to raise funds for a military emergency. In 1551, a surcharge of 1,157,340 taels of silver was added to the grain tax quota for the southern provinces. After that point, however, such funds were usually raised piecemeal at the local level without reference to any general policy or fiscal plan. The central government, however, concentrated on providing additional subsidies to the northern frontier commands. Southern governors and governors-general were authorized to exercise their own discretion to achieve fiscal solvency within their provinces.

To provide additional supplies to the northern frontier, the Ministry of Revenue gradually emerged as an operating agency, although in a very limited capacity. The difficulty was that, having served in the past only as a general accounting office, the ministry failed to maintain physical control over the empire's financial resources. It now found that it had no regular source of income at its disposal. All revenues had been allocated for numerous specific budgets and channeled to various supply lines. Manipulating the accounts yielded no appreciable new income. The ministry did order several northern provinces to step up their tax deliveries to the army posts. Records show that in 1502, Shantung, Shansi, Honan, and North Chihli altogether delivered 1,600,000 piculs of grain or its equivalent from their tax income to frontier installations. In 1578, the total amount delivered was in the vicinity of 3,300,000 piculs.⁴¹ Stipends payable to the imperial clansmen were largely deferred. In many instances low-ranked imperial clansmen went unpaid for decades. Desperation drove some of them to mutiny. By that time, however, the tax accounts had been squeezed dry.

The Ministry of Revenue's deliveries of silver to frontier commands nonetheless increased steadily. Before 1500, Peking's annual payments to the bor-

41 These figures are based on the unedited data in *TMHT*, 28.

der garrisons were less than 500,000 taels. During the 1540s and 1550s, the payments were never less than two million taels, and in several critical years, from 1551 to 1553 for example, an annual payment perhaps in excess of four million taels was dispatched.⁴² In the later part of the century, beginning about 1570, subsidies to the northern border garrisons were permanently fixed between 3,100,000 and 3,500,000 taels per year.⁴³

These funds came from a number of sources. From the salt monopoly, the Ministry of Revenue extracted one million taels in cash. The annual quota for tribute grain was set at four million piculs. After 1541, rarely more than 2.5 million piculs was delivered in kind; the remaining 1.5 million piculs was collected in silver. This produced another million taels. Portions of the ministry's income came from inland customs duties, payments for rationed salt, commutations of animal fodder requisitions, and rents on the government land which had been set aside to support the imperial stable and the imperial zoo. Such palace supplies as cotton cloth, which had originally been part of the grain quotas of contributing districts, were, from time to time, converted to payments in cash. The remainder of the funds was obtained from the commutation of punishments and the sale of rank. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, income from those sources had a projected value of four million taels. After deducting some 7,000,000 taels for the maintenance of the capital, including the payments for the capital garrison, the balance of the sum was usually forwarded to the fourteen army districts.

In 1569, the vice-minister of war, T'an Lun, stated that the army had an authorized strength of 3,138,300 men; but that actually only 845,000 men could be accounted for. The latter figure seems to be quite reasonable. About 500,000 men with at least 100,000 horses were serving along the northern frontier. With subsidies from Peking, tax deliveries by the northern provinces, and the internally generated materials and funds of the fourteen commands, the budget for the army in the north came to a total sum of 8,170,000 taels. This level of support was barely sufficient for routine maintenance; meanwhile, the delivery of subsidies had already exhausted the fund-raising capacities of the Ministry of Revenue.

In the southern part of the empire, pressure from the campaigns against pirate raiders (*wo-k'ou*) forced provincial and local authorities to levy numerous new taxes as well as to add new surtaxes to old ones, all for the sake of securing military supplies (*ping-hsiang*). These taxes were imposed on hitherto tax-exempt monastic properties, lumber land which had only been lightly taxed, new iron mines and foundaries, salt carried across provincial bound-

42 See MSL, *Shih-tsung shih lu*, 456, pp. 7712-13.

43 MSL, *Shen-tsung shih lu*, 154, p. 2853; 186, p. 3484; 234, p. 4331; *Cb'un ming meng yü lu*, 35, p. 28b.

aries, merchandise in transit over principal bridges, maritime tariffs, and in some districts, even the butchering of cattle. Managed by local officials and army officers, the total amount was never disclosed, so no integrated account was ever made available. From what scattered evidence of rates remains, it appears that administrative efficiency was low. The maritime tariff collected in Fukien, for instance, was generally calculated at 1 or 2 percent *ad valorem*. Until 1600, the annual revenue from maritime tariff at Canton did not exceed 40,000 taels.⁴⁴

The major portion of the extra revenue, however, was derived from the service levy, in other words, from agrarian sources. Quite logically, the governors-general first ordered that militia service be commuted to monetary payments to finance the new army of recruits. The second step of fund-raising was called *t'i-pien*. There is no precise English equivalent for this term. While *t'i* means to lift up, *pien* means to organize. By the middle of the sixteenth century, most districts still followed the *chiün-yao* (equitable) tax system, under which each tax-paying household was liable for material requisitions and labor services, once every five years. Under the *t'i-pien* system, the government called those households who were scheduled to serve in the following year to active duty in the current year. In reality, no materials were required; no labor service was to be performed. All the obligations were commuted to cash payments and delivered to the war chest. The materials and labor services in demand in the second year were, in turn, provided by those who originally had been scheduled to serve during the third year, and so on.

The devices mentioned enabled the empire to get through these military crises without altering its basic fiscal arrangements. Obviously, however, the empire's fiscal apparatus had been stretched to its very limits in the process. Furthermore, these new provisions made the entire organization more complicated than it had ever been before. Consequently, a great amount of potential tax proceeds went uncollected, and the new arrangements produced only scattered and insufficient sources of new revenue.

The single whip reform and its limitations

Fiscal operations under the Ming were predicated on a principle that we would now call "pre-tax-collection allocation." That is, the tax collection system was set up with the major divisions of revenue appropriation in mind. Thus, a typical taxpayer would have been assessed a certain amount for the defense of the empire, another amount for the support of public health, a

44 Liang Fang-chung, "Ming-tai kuo-chi mao-i yü yin-ti shu-ch'u-yü," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih chi-k'an* 6, 2 (1939), pp. 267–324, at p. 305, quoting the 1601 edition of *Kuang-tung t'ung chih*.

third amount for the development of a transportation system, and so on. In a way, the tax assessments directly reflected the structure of the budget. All this happened because, in Ming times, revenue transactions, along with their accompanying fiscal responsibilities, were implemented at the lower levels of the administration. Banking techniques had not developed sufficiently to be used for handling public funds.

During the sixteenth century, a taxpayer might have been assessed a certain number of piculs of grain for his basic payment. The basic assessment, however, served only as a general index of his tax payment. "One picul of grain" might simultaneously include portions of the tax that were payable in kind, portions that were payable in silver, and still other portions payable in cotton cloth. The fractional amount of these commodities in the payment depended on the schedule of the amounts of each of them a given district was required to deliver. Each component of the payment also carried a different kind of surcharge to cover transportation and handling costs. The service levy was even more complex. The *chün-yao* system had already broken the labor service imposition into two parts, one covering material requisitions and the other covering labor services. These contributions were forwarded to governmental offices at different administrative levels, and they had to be accounted for item by item.

The collection of silver in lieu of services started in the fifteenth century and became widespread in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, there was no mechanism in the civil government or in the village communities to dispatch the payments after pooling them. Consequently, villagers were assessed with dozens of payments, even though the rates they were to be charged were not all clearly set forth. The introduction of the *t'i-pien* system requiring pre-payment of the next year's service complicated the situation further. It placed yet another group of tax agents in the local communities. Since this collection system was under the supervision of the military defense intendants, they also commissioned tax expeditors and built up another channel of command, pressurizing the community (*li*) chiefs and households who were part of a rotation to provide needed supplies even when they were not able. Ho Liang-chün, a contemporary, described the conditions in his native Hua-t'ing county in the Southern Metropolitan Region. He noted that there were twelve different tax deadlines within a month, that numerous villagers were drafted as tax collectors and that this interfered with farm work. Such adverse conditions gave the single whip reform its momentary impetus. Even during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, many provincial and local officials already realized that the community (*li-chia*) system had outlived its usefulness. The service levy accounts had become too unwieldy and complex to justify their continued communal administration in the villages.

The financial burdens of many job assignments under this system were heavy enough to bankrupt individual households. Above all, with most influential households claiming tax exemptions, the principle of progressive taxation was nowhere observed. It would have been far more practical to abolish the service cycles and property qualifications altogether, and to have apportioned all the service obligations equally against the taxable land in the district and the entire pool of able-bodied men (*ting*), and to have collected the payments in silver annually.

Yet, such a concept of tax-collection only provided the general outline behind the implementation of the single whip method (*i t'iao pien fa*) of taxation. In practice, each district had its own problems. In some counties, the land tax accounts were too small and the service levy accounts were too large. In these counties it was difficult to turn the service levy even partially into a surtax on the land tax. The assessment on able-bodied men (*ting*) also lacked uniformity. In no district did the total number of listed able-bodied men (*ting*) truly comprise the entire taxable male adult population. In counties that assessed fewer able-bodied men (*ting*) per household, the number of males (*ting*) in each household might be in proportion to a household's property holding. For example, other counties assessed considerably more able-bodied men (*ting*) per household, but many of those assessed were destitute and unable to pay taxes. Tax exemptions, urban populations, and uncultivated acreages all created peculiar situations that warranted readjustments. While the most favored formula was *ting ssu t'ien liu* (that is, the land was assessed for 60 percent of the financial burden of the service levy and the listed able-bodied men (*ting*) were assessed for 40 percent), the exact proportions of the assessment varied from one county to the next.

In apportioning to taxable land the burden of taxes required, local officials also followed a variety of approaches. Some utilized the acreage unit, the *mu*, as the basic tax unit. This arrangement, however, was unfair to taxpayers in those districts where productivity per acre (*mu*) varied widely. In such cases, officials preferred to use the basic unit for land tax assessment, the picul of grain, as the tax unit, and would put a "piggyback" surtax into effect. This approach, however, required a great deal of computation, as exemplified by the tax rate for Chia-ting county, which, for accounting purposes, was computed to the thirteenth decimal place. A third approach involved converting the taxable acreage into abstract fiscal males (*ting*). For instance, every fifty acres (*mu*) of land was considered equivalent to one able-bodied man (*ting*). The acreage was then taxed as if it were owned by one real man (*ting*), a payment for the service levy being added to the regular land tax payment. Wu-ch'ing county in the Southern Metropolitan Region even reversed this approach by converting real men (*ting*) into abstract acres (*mu*). Since that dis-

strict was able to shift a greater portion of the service levy to taxable acreage, the acre (*mu*) could be conveniently established as the basic tax unit. The conversion of the labor service levy on a relatively few able-bodied men (*ting*) to a proportionately allocated surtax on cultivated land actually saved computation and accounting costs.

One might have expected this reform to result in the consolidation of all taxes into a single land tax. The reality fell far short of this ideal. Many counties managed to consolidate the tax consignments for which they were responsible. However, higher offices still required taxes in kind and the service obligations they always had. Theoretically, the use of silver as a medium of tax payment should have facilitated a consolidation of taxes. During the era of the Ming dynasty, however, the imperial government never established a central treasury, nor provincial branch offices for central government tax administration, nor did the government ever set up purchasing agencies to consolidate procurement. In addition, imperial revenues were never clearly separated from revenues intended for local usage. Responsibilities for the collection and expenditure of tax revenues remained divided between local, prefectural, and central government agencies. Furthermore, every agency receiving tax revenue was responsible for collecting the tax from those who were supposed to provide it. As long as these conditions prevailed, the reform could not deeply affect the overall financial situation.

The administrative and logistic capacities of the local government expanded slightly during the sixteenth century, but not sufficiently to allow local governments to forgo all the services performed by the taxpayers in person, or to forgo forcing ill-defined fiscal responsibilities on the local populace as the need arose. In the main, fiscal administration during the first two centuries of Ming rule (roughly 1370–1570) placed great emphasis on administrative record keeping, but paid too little attention to the practical requirements of field operations. In the face of the reform's requirements, the general level of taxation could not be expanded rapidly enough to cover all the new administrative expenses. The inadequate staffing of local governments could not be remedied easily. Furthermore, to account for every tael of silver or its equivalent in material contributions or to document labor services provided by the general population in detail involved too many technical difficulties. The reform also was handicapped by the lack of an adequate imperial currency. The amount of silver in circulation was barely sufficient to cover the tax in some geographical areas and entirely insufficient in other regions, as Ku Yen-wu noted in the seventeenth century.

In sum, a more fundamental reform would have required a restructuring of the government and a new understanding of the concept of public finance. As it was, the single whip reform was put into effect by provincial and local

officials, with virtually no central direction or coordination. Both before and after the reform, no governmental agency was authorized to establish a sinking fund, even for its own maintenance. The budgeting of such expenses for the most part still followed the traditional practice: the numbers of sedan chair bearers, the quantities of charcoal, and the oil supplies were counted at their previous levels with little, if any, regard to actual conditions and the services or materials were converted into a payment in silver. The single whip reform, therefore, did not amount to much more than a modification of the existing tax structure. The elimination of labor services performed by individual draftees was more thorough in some districts than others. This change considerably reformed tax collection. Many formerly unlisted items now became listed with published tax rates. The reforms, however, did not modernize the tax structure. Sample tax bills issued by some local governments upon introducing the single whip reform show that taxpayers were still assessed for a dozen or so separate payments. Only the total amount was computed by the government office for the taxpayer. Needless to say, the principle of "pre-tax-collection allocation" persisted.⁴⁵

Irregular levies and corruption

Because their salaries were unrealistically low, Ming bureaucrats could only hope to maintain a relative sense of financial integrity. While embezzlement of public funds was unfavorably regarded, to derive extra personal income from the populace, especially when the amount fell within what public opinion considered reasonable, was not deemed an offense. Few would have even called it a breach of the moral or ethical code. In fact, in the sixteenth century such income was regularly and automatically forwarded by tax agents commissioned by the local administrators to their offices under the name of "customary fees" (*ch'ang-li*). When a community (*li*) chief was appointed, he presented a ritual payment to the magistrate. Thereafter, whenever a tax consignment was delivered to the local government, small gifts of money were offered to the magistrate, his staff, and the prefect. When taxes were paid in kind, such gratuities were presented as "samples." The amounts were small, the share of the magistrate usually being no more than 2 percent of the principal tax payment. Merchants carrying salt through a county's territory also offered gifts to the local magistrate that usually amounted to less than one-thousandth of the value of the cargo in transit. The significance of the customary fees was that they were virtually mandatory, even though extraordinarily

45 Such a sample tax bill appears in *K'uai-chi Chih* (1572 ed.), 7, pp. 12b-13a.

honest officials would refuse such payments. After the middle of the sixteenth century, it seems that few county magistrates derived less than 500 taels a year (eighteen times their nominal salaries) from these fees alone.

Some of these irregular levies fell into the twilight zone of legality. When the operating budget of the government was insufficient, the magistrate ordered the community (*li*) chiefs to present themselves, in turn, at his office each day. Of these irregular official expenses, the largest items (the entertainment of visiting dignitaries and the travel expenses of the magistrate himself and his staff) were to be paid by the community (*li*) chief on duty. Frequently criticized, the practice was nonetheless consistent with the principle that government offices were to be supported by the governed through ad hoc contributions rather than through careful fiscal planning. Likewise, salt administrators demanded that local merchants who regularly traded with the government answer their irregular demands and service calls. Such privileges were often abused by officialdom. In the 1560s a prefect in the Southern Metropolitan Region was reported to have kept a troupe of actors in his own home at the taxpayers' expense.

Officials who connived at corruption could extend their personal incomes considerably more. Law suits provided a common source for their illicit exactions. Kuei Yu-kuang, having served as a county magistrate himself, indicated that whenever a wealthy person was accused of manslaughter, the presiding magistrate, with little effort, could "immediately enrich himself by several hundred taels."

The building of waterworks presented another opportunity for supervising officials to enrich themselves. Inasmuch as the material and labor costs were obtained from the local communities and were under virtually no budgetary controls, much room was left for managerial manipulation. Often, source documents indicate that the officials in charge accumulated "surplus" revenues of over several thousand taels. Revenue offices were considered lucrative posts, especially those located in the southern provinces. The administration of the salt monopoly was so corrupt in the sixteenth century that "the name of anyone who was appointed salt administrator was already tainted." In 1616, all six salt distribution commissioners were indicted for malfeasance.⁴⁶

Bureaucrats remote from the revenue offices received gifts from their fellow officials. Capital officials were virtually subsidized by the provincial and local officials. Hai Jui, regarded by his contemporaries as one of the most upright civil servants in the sixteenth century, called the year when the provincial officials reported to Peking for personal evaluation "the year that the

46 *Huang-ming Ching-shih wen-pien*, 475, p. 24.

capital officials collected their rents.” The exchange of presents is often referred to in the correspondence of Ming officials. The extant collection of Hai Jui’s letters contains six such references. The gift he received from one military defense intendant was substantial enough to permit him to purchase a piece of land.

A more extensive exposé of such practices is the task of social historians. In the light of fiscal history, however, this organized corruption reveals more a fundamental problem of institutional weakness than a problem of moral decay. Items allocated in the budget were not always disbursed, nor did the accounts list all the categories of revenue collected. The information in the accounts, therefore, was half true and half fictitious. This fiscal chaos was caused by insufficient revenue for operating budgets and wages.

On the basis of extant statutes, memorials, imperial and local accounts, and private papers, it can be estimated that, in the late sixteenth century, all officially listed items of revenues, including administrative incomes, taxes, and miscellaneous collections, amounted to 37 million taels of silver each year. According to Ping-ti Ho, the population of the Ming empire at the time approached 150 million persons.⁴⁷ The estimated total revenue was nearly the amount of the total wages earned by three million day laborers. This figure suggests that the share taken from the gross national product was much too small to provide efficient and honest government. Furthermore, even this projected income was rarely collected in full.

During the late sixteenth century, many local officials tried to incorporate unlisted sources of revenue into the regular tax accounts: an action which was one purpose of the single whip reforms. Such efforts to reform the tax system had only limited effects. Both technical difficulties and social customs worked against the realization of such schemes. By the late sixteenth century, when taxes were, for the most part, collected in silver, the customary fees were gradually integrated into the tax under the category of “melting charges” (*huo-bao*). Fiscal procedure required that the chunks and bits of unminted silver be re-melted and cast into oval shaped ingots for transit to government vaults. An actual loss of 1 to 3 percent of the silver was incurred in this process. Before the sixteenth century ended, some local administrators were extracting an additional 2 percent as their “melting” fees. Owing to the decline of administrative discipline and the rise of cost of living, in the mid-seventeenth century this kind of extra collection expanded drastically. Ku Yen-wu reported that, in his time, melting charges comprised as much

47 Ho, *Studies on the Population*, pp. 23, 277.

as 20 to 30 percent of major tax payments and 70 to 80 percent of minor tax payments.

Fiscal stability under Chang Chü-cheng

During the decade from 1572 to 1582, under the guidance of grand-secretary Chang Chü-cheng, governmental finance began to show marked signs of improvement. By 1587, the old vault of the T'ai-ts'ung Treasury had accumulated 6 million taels of silver; the ingots there bore the inscription "never to be spent." The new vault, which handled current accounts, also held 4 million taels in an underground facility. The army studs entrusted to civilian households for maintenance had been sold; the proceeds, almost 4 million taels, were deposited in the Ministry of War's Ch'ang-ying Treasury. At the same time, the silver vaults at Nanking were reported to have had 2.5 million taels in reserve. Smaller surpluses were held by local and provincial treasuries in the southern provinces. The funds enumerated equaled about six months' worth of the total annual revenues due to the state. This abundance may seem to challenge the interpretation of the Ming fiscal crisis (that it arose from insufficient revenue) presented so far and could be interpreted to mean that the revenue under the Ming was adequate to meet the state's needs. This apparent abundance, however, was insufficient to forestall a financial crisis because Ming fiscal management was unsound.

The fact is that this fiscal retrenchment was carried out when a peace settlement with Altan had been achieved, and when the threat of Japanese pirates (*wo-k'ou*) was diminishing. Chang ordered a rigorous audit of all current accounts, some of which he scrutinized himself. Under his stringent measures, all functions of the government deemed unnecessary or not urgent were either suspended or postponed. The number of students on government stipends was reduced; palace eunuchs on procurement missions were kept under strict supervision. Provincial officials were ordered to curtail their use of corvée labor, generally to one-third the existing level. The hostel services provided by the imperial postal system were reduced to virtually nothing. Yet, despite these economies, most of the taxes levied on the population remained unreduced. Those savings realized were turned over to government treasuries. Tax delinquents were prosecuted with vigor; their arrearages pressed for in earnest. The sale of rank and ecclesiastic licenses continued when Chang was in office. His austerity program extended to army logistics. Since the Mongols were pacified for a time, frontier guards and patrols along the northern border were reduced so that extra pay and rations could be saved and more soldiers returned to work as farmers. The governors-general in charge of frontier defense were

advised to cut their disbursements by 20 percent of the annual income received from Peking.

On the whole, this rearrangement of the fiscal system involved no innovation. There was no reorganization of governmental offices. The entire effort can be seen as an unprecedented attempt to squeeze revenue out of the existing budget. Steps leading to a more fundamental reform (normalizing official salaries, devising a new monetary system, and making the transfer of funds between and among treasuries more efficient) was not even contemplated. An entry in the *Official History of the Ming* asserts that, in 1591, Chang ordered all districts of the empire to implement the single whip reform. Chang's own writings, however, attest that he refused to press this issue. The rescript that he drafted on behalf of the emperor permitted regional and local administrators to find and implement tax formulas appropriate for their jurisdictions.⁴⁸

The negative approach of this fiscal reorganization is obvious. During the decade that Chang was in office, the accumulation of large reserves of silver (on average more than one million taels each year) had already caused a depression of agricultural prices. Inasmuch as the bullion had not been utilized to revitalize either the government or the general economy, the harmful effect of these economizing measures might have outweighed the good. Chang Chü-cheng's failure to attempt a fundamental restructuring of the tax system may have resulted more from a political stalemate in the central leadership than from a paucity of ideas. The court in Peking comprised a delicate balance of numerous regional, personal, and cliquish interest groups. Nominally, all power rested in the emperor. In reality, the occupants of the dragon throne were either ill-equipped to take a serious interest in this issue or too indolent to carry out a policy if they endorsed it. While no one in the bureaucracy was able to build up a substantial power base within the court, all tried their best to prevent their rivals from moving ahead. In fact, Chang Chü-cheng's austerity program, executed in the name of enforcing the dynastic laws of the first Ming emperor, had already made the grand secretary a target for general criticism. Both his admirers and his critics agreed that the unpopularity of his fiscal retrenchment, put into effect by manipulating the power normally reserved for the emperor, had much to do with his posthumous disgrace. It is very unlikely that he could have taken a more positive stance under the prevailing political conditions. His personal correspondence is dotted with statements to the effect that he had no freedom to act and that he could not even disclose his plans to his colleagues.

⁴⁸ Chang Chü-cheng, *Chang Chiang-ling shu tu* (rpt., Shanghai, 1917), 4, p. 5. The rescript appears in *MSL*, *Shen-tsung shih lu*, 68, p. 1490.

While the various measures taken by Chang Chü-cheng involved no institutional changes, they nonetheless signaled the preparation for a more fundamental reform. In the main, the fiscal structure and practices in effect for over two centuries could not be overturned easily. For a decade, Chang merely managed to produce a treasury surplus, and he was on the verge of putting the empire's fiscal data in order. Late in 1580, he finally mustered sufficient political strength to order a national land survey. The 6,000 square foot *mu* (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres) was adopted as the universal standard for land area measurement. The classification of land productivity was limited to three grades within each district. Initially, no plans were made to reapportion the tax quotas among the districts; the survey was intended only to redistribute the tax burden within each county's population. Although not a complete failure, the survey was definitely not a success. In some districts, the grand secretary's order was faithfully carried out, in others, the officials used the old data in the new returns with but a few minor adjustments. In certain counties the units of measurement were compromised. Regional returns were, as a consequence, so diverse that final results could not be tabulated. When Chang died on the 9 July 1582, the survey had still not been completed. Immediately after his death, the whole project came under criticism. It was suggested that the new returns be abandoned. A decree issued some weeks later permitted the local districts to decide for themselves whether to use the new land survey as a basis of taxation or not.⁴⁹

Thus, his good intentions notwithstanding, Chang Chü-cheng's contribution to Ming fiscal reform had only limited positive effects. Undoubtedly, his accumulation of silver bullion in state treasuries prolonged the dynasty's life but failed to give it a new lease on life. After 1592, Ming armies were sent to Korea to check Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion. In that year another campaign was launched against Pubei in Ningsia. The suppression of Yang Yung-lung and the Miao tribesmen, which began in 1594, ended in 1600. These three major campaigns could probably not have been carried out without committing the treasury reserves accumulated during Chang's life-time. By the first years of the seventeenth century, though, that bullion had been spent and the financial situation had become worse than it had been when Chang took office.

49 *MSL, Shen-tsung shih lu*, 69, p. 2378; 128, p. 2530; 146, p. 2732.

The final collapse in the seventeenth century

During most of the dynasty's history, the Ming empire operated on a non-competitive basis. Frontier incursions by Mongolian tribesmen, brigandage by coastal pirates, natural disasters, and peasant rebellions sometimes threatened the security of the state, though never seriously. The Imperial bureaucrats' loyalty to the throne was unswerving. Throughout the Ming period neither a civil official nor a general ever raised his standard against the state. The populace, furthermore, tolerated misgovernment to a great degree. As a rule, peasant rebels failed in their headstrong adventures for they were unable to gain the support of the educated elite. A recent study by James Parsons indicates that, even in the late Ming, rebel leaders faced the same dilemma. Although they succeeded in rallying their rural followers, they never were able to attract the urban population to their cause. Given these conditions, the dynasty could exist with a minimum of military and economic strength. There was no need to take administrative efficiency seriously. In the sixteenth century, pirates, sometimes numbering less than one hundred in a band, could roam inland for several hundred miles unchecked. The durability of the Ming empire was not based on its merit, but on the lack of an alternative.

The rise of Nurhaci at the turn of the sixteenth century altered the situation. Soon, the Manchus also developed a civil service, an effective system of military organization, and foundries for forging new weapons. After the battle of Fushan in 1618, their position in Manchuria was secure. Following the battle, the Manchus bided their time.

The collapse of the Ming dynasty in 1644 came about for a number of reasons. The lavishness of Shen-tsung, the alienation of the courtiers from the emperor, the dispatching of eunuch tax collectors in the 1590s, factionalism in the court, Wei Chung-hsien's rise under Hsi-tsung, the personal management of the war by Chuang-lieh-ti, and finally, peasants' rebellions, all contributed to the dynasty's downfall. Possibly, without the early mistakes, Nurhaci could have been dealt with more effectively. By avoiding later mistakes, the dynasty could at least have held on longer. Nothing, however, could change the fact that, in the early seventeenth century, the Ming empire was ill-equipped to fight a full-scale war with a rival state, despite the many obvious advantages the Ming had over rival states.

The basic fact was that the government could not mobilize the financial resources of the realm. At their highest point, military expenditures in the seventeenth century reached 21 million taels a year. According to the fund-raising program instituted in 1623, about two-thirds of the war expenditures were met by land tax increases, the balance being made up by forced savings on other expenditures, the disposal of granary deposits, the omission of tax

exemptions, and a new tax on pawn shops. The land tax increases were put into effect by seven successive orders, each new increase overriding the old. Yet, after the last tax increase in 1639, the total of these emergency surtaxes amounted to only 0.0268 taels per acre (*mu*); in addition, a 10 percent increment was assessed on all basic land tax payments in excess of one tael of silver. Areas stricken by calamity were exempted. The fifth tax increase, which was put into effect in 1635, contained a 10 percent increment, but covered only the five central provinces of the empire.⁵⁰ (The acre (*mu*) mentioned here refers to a fiscal acreage.)

Why did contemporaries persistently clamor that those rates were excessive? All accountable items assessed on farm land, based on the late sixteenth-century records totaled between 5 and 10 percent of the crop value in most districts. Since the average income from a *mu* in the early seventeenth century ranged from 0.5 taels of silver per acre (*mu*) to 1.2 taels per acre (*mu*) (depending on the farm prices in the particular district) the surtaxes could not have boosted the collection to a level above 10 percent of the total income per acre (*mu*); evidently in many districts the level of taxation remained close to 10 percent. Indeed, the prefectures in the Yangtze delta provided an exceptional case. From the beginning of the dynasty, the basic tax rates in that region had been higher than elsewhere in the empire. Seventeenth-century increases, however, largely apportioned on the basis of the fiscal acre (*mu*), made the rate of the increase in that region much less than it was elsewhere. Furthermore, the impact of tax increases after 1618 was cushioned by inflation. In many provinces, farm prices were 40 percent higher than they had been in the late sixteenth century. The annual emergency fund of twenty-one million taels, if collected in full, was only sufficient to support an army of half a million men. It is hard to believe that, owing to the collection of taxes for the war, “the agricultural economy of China was bled to exhaustion.”

A point deserving our attention is that, in the late Ming, the land tax was as much a state institution as it was a social institution. The population had become accustomed to the regional tax quotas and had made readjustments to pay them. After-tax farm income was meticulously divided among owners, renters, moneylenders, and other interested parties. Customary fees were provided for local administrators and payments were made to the village tax collectors. Tax obligations could be transferred by private contract with the sale of property. Surpluses derived from the division of profit were, with few exceptions, reinvested in landholding or related investments. The result was a diminishing per capita return on investment. For more than two centu-

⁵⁰ Ray Huang, “Fiscal administration during the Ming dynasty,” *Chinese government in Ming times: seven studies*, ed. Charles O. Hucker (New York, 1970), p. 118.

ries, taxation had not been employed to regulate social institutions; it was now subject to their pressure.

Although, by the seventeenth century, a revision of the tax rates was not impossible; it would have had to have been done very gradually by incrementally cutting into after-tax farm income. Even in implementing the single whip method in the sixteenth century, the local administrators always apportioned one item at a time in order to avoid drastic changes. In many districts, tax reforms took decades to be fully implemented. In 1583, the permanent commutation of tribute grain tax into payments in silver in Chia-ting county in the Southern Metropolis Region brought about a sizeable reduction in the taxes of that district. It immediately caused the price of farmland in Chia-ting county to rise sharply and numerous law suits followed.⁵¹ One can easily imagine the social consequences of a major tax increase.

Ming administrators opposed tax increases in the past because they led to even greater arrearages. When improperly handled, tax proceeds could amount to less after the increase than before it had been put into effect. When a tax increase was first inaugurated, some of the marginal landowners genuinely could not pay their tax. Local administrators would then have to arrest and flog them. In extreme cases tax delinquents might be flogged to death. Yet, even the cruelest measures simply could not solve the problem. When a county accumulated a sizeable arrearage over a long period of time, the arrearage not only became uncollectable, but it also handicapped collection of the current tax. Petitions for permission to write off tax arrearages had to be submitted to the emperor. Writing arrearages off, however, encouraged tax delinquency. Many well-to-do landowners, especially those who held official status or an examination degree and who were therefore not subject to corporal punishment, also kept their payments in arrears. The longer they went without paying, the more likely it was that the arrearage would be forgiven.

After 1618, taxes were increased gradually. From a military point of view, this slow and ineffectual mobilization of the empire's financial resources seriously compromised the war. Later, the governor-general in Manchuria reported that the logistics of army supply were in a most lamentable state. Even supplies of bows and arrows were inadequate. When soldiers were ordered to put on armor, they had no undergarments to put under it. Troops constantly went unpaid. After the campaign had dragged on and wartime surtaxes continued to be added, tax arrearages became unmanageable. In 1632, the Ministry of Revenue reported that 340 counties were more than 50 percent in arrears on their current payments, and that, of these, 134 had delivered no

51 Ku Yen-wu, *T'ien hsia chün kuo li ping shu*, ch. 6, pp. 24b-26b, p. 35.

payment at all.⁵² Over the course of the following decades, army deserters joined up with roaming peasant war bands. As a result, taxes had to be raised further to provide supplies for bandit suppression. The last three tax increases, ordered in 1635, 1637, and 1639, were, in fact, expected to produce more revenue than the previous four increases combined. No adequate records of the outcome are available, but there can be little doubt that the targets were not met anywhere. Army units operating in the field requisitioned supplies from the populace, a practice in which they differed little from the bandits they were supposed to be suppressing. Chekiang province ordered that taxes be collected two years in advance, yet its delivery of tax revenues remained a year behind. During the last days of the dynasty, when Peking was under siege, the garrison had not been paid for five months. The empire's fiscal machinery, forced to bear a load that exceeded its capacity, collapsed before the dynasty did.

Revenues from other sources (goods and services in kind), having been neglected for centuries, made no significant contribution to the war effort. Only in the last two years of the dynasty did the minister of revenue, Ni Yan-lu, try desperately to raise funds from such sources. Before many of his projects could be put into effect, Peking had fallen.

CONCLUSION

The Ming fiscal system was a very peculiar institution. Its basic schematic framework remained in force throughout the entire history of the dynasty. Designed to suit a barter economy and to assist in maintaining a partly self-supporting army, the system still remained in place after silver was introduced as a common medium of exchange and after the emergence of a mercenary army. When it did not fit prevailing regional practices, its basic framework was manipulated to suit the situation. Its primary purpose was to maintain an appearance of stability and to uphold a standard of imperial uniformity, if not in substance, at least in form.

From the outset, the first Ming emperor's primary concern was to establish and to maintain forever a political *status quo*; he was not concerned about economic expansion. There was little emphasis in his fiscal programs on anything except establishing a uniform fiscal system throughout the empire. His standards for performance and collection were always set at the minimum level rather than at the maximum level: this approach, in practice, restrained the growth of the more advanced sectors of the economy so that less advanced

⁵² Meng Sen, *Ch'ung chen ts'ün shih su ch'ao* (1633; rpt. Peking, 1934), 2, pp. 72–89.

sectors could be fit into the same tax system. The introduction of grain as the standard form of tax payment, the organization of the *li-chia* system, the aversion to industrial and commercial sources of revenue, and the lack of logistical flexibility in the government administration itself all reflected his approach. Perhaps the first emperor never anticipated the deleterious effects his policies might have on the growth of the empire's economy; in any case, for him, the financial establishment served only to check the growth of regional fiscal imbalances.

The structure of the supply system also reveals the first emperor's fears that a sub-system not subject to his control might arise within his imperial system. When each revenue office had to make scores of deliveries and each disbursing agency had to receive tax consignments from a variety of sources, it became virtually impossible to gain control of the empire's revenues. A potential contender for the throne faced tremendous difficulties in organizing a fiscal base to sustain the initial phase of his rebellion. The policy of "divide and rule" was carried out so thoroughly that no fiscal officer could hold an account of his own. Under such conditions, loyalty to the emperor had its special relevance: military power could not easily transform itself into a political power. During the Ming period, the prestige of the military sank to the lowest level in Chinese history. With peripheral states too insignificant to be considered rivals, even the deterioration of the armed forces created no imminent danger.

For this stability and complacency, however, the Chinese paid a dear price. It is no exaggeration to say that the numerous charges of governmental corruption and official abuse, the social evil that became associated with public finance, and the lack of development of industry and commerce, can all, whether partly or wholly, directly or indirectly, be traced to the fiscal practices established by the first emperor.

First, the Ming government was given no incentive to foster economic growth. After the middle period of the dynasty, the empire's scattered fiscal accounts could no longer even be integrated. The use of silver in transactions was merely a variation on the same theme. Numerous parcels of unminted silver moved from one end of the empire to another, gradually replacing numerous grain consignments that had previously moved from one end of the empire to another. Operating on a non-competitive basis, officials never developed a true sense of the role of a budget in financial management. Unlike feudal lords in Europe and in Tokugawa Japan, who, in an atmosphere of competition were gradually compelled to enlist the aid of merchants for support, and who, in the course of time, liberalized trade regulations to allow merchants to function in accord with current commercial principles, the Ming emperors and ministers never faced a similar situation. Even commuting scheduled ser-

vices and supplies to cash payments did not alter, by any means, the methods of the fiscal administration. The government never renounced its right to requisition and to commandeer. In marketing government salt, civil administrators could even draft merchants to serve or blacklist them at will. Throughout the Ming period, civil bureaucrats could rely on political power to compensate for the lack of economic rationality in the fiscal system.

Some historians, relying on occasional scattered pieces of evidence, have argued that, during the late Ming and early Ch'ing period, there were "buds of capitalism" that began to grow out of the "feudal" political structure of the imperial state.⁵³ In the light of the Ming fiscal administration, however, it would seem that industrial and commercial capitalization could never progress very far solely on the efforts of entrepreneurs. Such a development lacked both the active support and the non-interference of the government. In the late Ming, because of the absence of a sound monetary system, interest rates remained at a level of 2 to 5 percent a month, and were mostly compound rates.⁵⁴ The numerous business tax stations, fish duty stations, and other governmental offices still employed hosts of unpaid patrolmen and scribes who harassed itinerant traders. Residential merchants were forced by local magistrates to make up deficits in local tax accounts. Not infrequently, merchants were forced to sell goods to the government at prices that bankrupted them. Industrial mines were sealed for security reasons. Conceivably, some people in the late Ming realized sizeable profits from commercial agriculture, handicraft industries, and retail trade. After a certain point, however, they seem to have found it more judicious to transfer their fortunes to investments in land holding or to urge their descendants to pursue an official career rather than to continue to expand the business.

The Ming government not only did not foster economic growth, it actively opposed government involvement in commercial activity. Under the T'ang and Sung dynasties, officials commissioned to transmit revenues from the provinces to the capital were provided with discretionary funds, authorized to buy and sell en route, and encouraged and expected to make profits for the imperial fisc. The anti-commercial attitude prevalent in the Ming led to the demise of such commercial activity. Over-reliance on the land tax for income also reversed the trend to place more emphasis on revenue from trade and commerce which had been common in previous dynasties.

In view of the limited level of state income, it is difficult to say that taxation in the late Ming broke the backbone of Chinese agrarian economy. Sufficient

53 This argument involves a certain amount of rhetoric as Albert Feuerwerker has pointed out in his, "From 'Feudalism' to 'Capitalism' in recent historical writing from mainland China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 18, No. 1 (1958), pp. 107-16.

54 P'eng Hsin-wei, *Chung-kuo Huo pi shih*, Vol. 2, p. 742. Lien-sheng Yang, *Money and credit in China*, p. 98.

revenue still could have been generated from agrarian sources, either by progressive taxation on the wealthy landowners, or conversely, by giving tax exemptions to the marginal landowners so that the general rates could be raised above the minimum level of taxation then in effect. Such approaches were clearly far beyond the administrative capacity of the government and the technical ability of seventeenth-century administration. In fact the Ming administration moved away from such ideal solutions.

The result was that the limited amount of disposable revenue restricted the outlook of the government. It turned to becoming top heavy. There were more palace attendants serving the emperor than there were civil administrators running the empire. Lacking the resources needed to implement any functional program of tax reform, the government simply made superficial adjustments in fiscal administration. Fiscal operations were based on a pyramidal structure: tax consignments were still delivered to the top, but were discounted or defaulted at the bottom. In keeping with the general structure of power under the Ming, fiscal authority resided at the highest levels; the responsibility for implementing policy remained at the bottom levels. All the impractical features of the system were supposed to be resolved at the lowest level. This approach caused the quality of local government to deteriorate. Tax regulations became inseparable from social custom, the one perverting the other. Officialdom offered ever fewer services to the governed; instead, for the most part, they demanded services from the general public. Some conscientious officials tried to improve the situation. At best, their attempts turned out to be more inspirational than methodical. Although there were local attempts to change the system, fundamental reforms never occurred.

The authoritarian tradition of the Chinese government was, in part, ingrained by history and, in part, dictated by geography. Nevertheless, the Ming system prolonged and strengthened this tradition. More importantly, it continued to implement this style of government at the dawn of the modern era in world history.

CHAPTER 3

MING LAW

Law in traditional China derived from the emperor's commands, and codes of law were instructions to the emperor's magistrates instructing them how to impose punishments for behavior that ran counter to the emperor's interests.¹ Ming law came into existence with the first commands issued by the founder of the dynasty when he ascended the throne in 1368. Written law took the form of rules and collections of descriptions of specific punishments for specific crimes. These were promulgated by order of the emperor. Early in his reign, the first Ming emperor was careful to insure that his dynasty would enjoy the benefits of a body of written law known as a *lü* or code. His close attention to the compilation of a code was a product of his perception that the preceding Yüan dynasty, during which the Mongols ruled China, had been defective in its lack of a formal legal code. The founder of the Ming felt that a code was valuable to a ruler because it assisted him in maintaining bureaucratic discipline, public order, and permanent institutions that centered around his line of descent. A code was, furthermore, a symbol of the legitimacy of his rule.²

Because the founder of the Ming devoted a fair amount of attention to compiling formal codes, a number of versions appeared during his reign. The Ming dynasty's first codified laws were promulgated in 1368 under the rubric *lü-ling*, or code and commands. Although an integrated version of the text has not been found, we do have the 1368 version of the *ling* or "commands," sometimes translated "ordinances," consisting of 145 separate

1 See William C. Jones, *The Great Qing Code* (Oxford, 1994), introduction.

2 For Ming T'ai-tsu's views on the Yüan, see *MS*, 93, p. 2279; for a survey of early Ming law codes, see Naitō Kenkichi, "Dai Min ryō kaisetsu," *Tōyōshi Kenkyū*, 1.5 (1937), rpt. in Naitō Kenkichi, ed., *Chūgoku hōseishi kōshō* (Tokyo, 1963), pp. 90–116. The absence of a formal code was a sore subject in Yüan times. For Yüan intellectuals' arguments in favor of a code, see Langlois, "Law, statecraft, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* in Yüan political thought." In *Yüan thought: Chinese thought and religion under the Mongols*, ed. Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York, 1982), pp. 89–153, esp. pp. 100–09.

articles.³ The no longer extant 1368 version of the *lü* or “statutory code” had 285 articles. These commands and articles were grouped into categories corresponding to the six ministries of the central government (Personnel, Revenue, Rites, War, Justice, and Public Works).

Before the end of the year the dynasty was founded, the emperor commanded several scholars to review the articles of the T’ang code of 653 AD (*T’ang lü shu i*) with the intention of revising the Ming code. He ordered his court scholars to select some twenty articles from the T’ang code each day for detailed analysis in his presence. From these, he selected articles that he felt were appropriate for continued use during his own dynasty, although the nature and degree of the punishments they prescribed were changed as deemed necessary.

This process of review and compilation of the central body of the written law of the dynasty continued almost throughout the entire reign of the first emperor. In 1373, he commanded his officials to revise the code (*lü*). The commands (*ling*), were not included in this revision and, in fact, the commands were never to play a significant role in the Ming legal system. Their role as supporting legislation was overtaken by the founding emperor’s own “grand pronouncements” and “placards.” The result of this revision was promulgated in 1374 in a configuration which was entirely different from that of the first version. In this new revision, the text followed the twelve categories of the T’ang code (General Provisions, Imperial Guard and Prohibitions, Administrative Regulations, Household and Marriage, Public Stables and Granaries, Unauthorized Levy, Violence and Robbery, Assaults and Accusations, Arrest and Flight, and Judgment and Prison). This version of the Ming code contained 606 articles, as compared with only 502 articles in the ancient T’ang code. Of the 606, some articles of the 1368 code had been carried over; others were former commands that were now incorporated as statutes; while still others were either alterations of old statutes or completely new inventions.

Revisions to the 1374 code were made in 1376, 1383, and 1389, with the last revision again involving a major reorganization of the contents. The number of articles changed each time as well, but by 1389 the number had stabilized at 460 articles. The 1389 or final version, known as the *Ta Ming lü* or “Great Ming Code,” was again organized according to the scheme used in the original 1368 version. That is, it comprised six main divisions corresponding to the six ministries, plus a seventh division derived from the structure of the T’ang code. Called General Principles, this seventh section headed the new code, making a total of seven main divisions in the text. Within each of the

3 This has been translated by Edward L. Farmer, “The Great Ming commandment (*Ta Ming ling*),” but has not yet been published.

TABLE 3.1
The Great Ming Code of 1389

Divisions and subdivisions		No. of articles
1. <i>General Principles</i>	47	
2. <i>Personnel</i>	33	
Administrative regulations		15
Standards of Official behavior		18
3. <i>Revenue</i>	95	
The household and corvée services		15
Landed property		11
Marriage		24
Government granaries and treasuries		24
Taxes and tariffs		19
Money lending		3
Public markets		5
4. <i>Rites</i>	26	
State sacrifices		6
Ceremonial regulations		20
5. <i>War</i>	75	
Imperial palaces and guards		19
Administration of the armed forces		20
Frontier guard posts		7
Horses and cattle		11
Postal services and transport		18
6. <i>Justice</i>	171	
Violence and theft		28
Homicide		20
Affrays and blows		22
Abusive language		8
Accusations and suits		12
Bribery and squeeze		11
Deception and fraud		12
Sexual violations		10
Miscellaneous offenses		11
Arrests and escapes		8
Trial and imprisonment		29
7. <i>Public Works</i>	13	
Public construction		9
River conservancy		4
Total	460	

Source: Based on Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, *Law in imperial China, exemplified by 190 Ch'ing dynasty cases translated from the Hsing-an hui-lan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 60–61.

six divisions named after the ministries, the text was further broken down according to basic legal categories (see Table 3.1).

As the founder of a dynasty, Chu Yüan-chang established himself as both the only legitimate law-giver and the supreme judge in the empire. He had tremendous energy and personally tried hundreds of individuals during his long reign. In his campaign to eliminate the abuses of government he perceived to have characterized the negligent administration of the Mongols,

he occasionally promulgated his own ad hoc judicial findings and rules. The chief printed products of this process were known as the *Grand Pronouncements* (*Ta kao*), issued in 1385, 1386, and twice in 1387.⁴ In these four texts, deliberately written in simple and comprehensible language, the emperor personally recorded his trials of corrupt officials, lower functionaries, military personnel, and ordinary subjects. In the sentences he imposed, he often applied punishments that were authorized neither in the code nor in his “commands.” Instead, the punishments he chose were arbitrary and whimsical, and often capricious and terrifying. The manner in which the *Grand Pronouncements* were produced could never be repeated by a succeeding emperor, since only the founder had the privilege to make law on the spot without regard to normative legal texts. Later emperors were bound by the house law of the dynasty to observe the established norms embodied in the Code.

The founding emperor promulgated his code again in 1397, the year before his death, along with selections from the *Grand Pronouncements*.⁵ This promulgation, known as the *Ta Ming lü kao* (Great Ming code and pronouncements), was comprised of the code itself, a section called the *lü-kao*, or “statutes and pronouncements,” pertaining to the rules of monetary redemption for nominal capital crimes, and some thirty-six items chosen from the four earlier *Grand Pronouncements*.⁶

The first emperor also promulgated laws and his personal edicts in the form of “placards” (*pang-wen*). On his orders, these were posted in public places throughout the empire. A placard dated 1389, for example, prescribed public execution by slicing (*ling-ch'ih*) for persons who brought litigation under false pretenses. The criminals' heads were to be displayed in front of their homes and the members of their households were to be exiled beyond the frontiers.⁷ These placards were not formally codified by the bureaucracy, so only a few have come down to us today. They do, however, truly illustrate the personal and idiosyncratic nature of the founder's rule.

4 On the *Ta kao*, see the items listed above, plus Shen Chia-pen, “Ming ‘Ta kao’ chün fa ling,” in *Shen Chi-i hsien-sheng i-shu*, chia-pien (Taipei, 1964), pp. 822–41; Teng Ssu-yü, “Ming ‘Ta kao’ yü Ming-ch’u chih cheng-chih she-hui,” *Yen-ching hsüeh pao*, 20 (1936), pp. 455–83; rpt. in Ming tai-tsu, *Ming-ch’ao k’ai-kuo wen-hsien*, in Wu Hsiang-hsiang, ed., *Chung-kuo shih hsüeh ts’ung shu*, Vol. 1, No. 34 (Taipei, 1966), pp. 1–26; Yang I-fan, *Ming Ta kao yen-chiu* (Nan-ching, 1988). See also Edward L. Farmer, “The despot as lawgiver: The codes of the founding Ming emperor,” paper presented at Association for Asian Studies annual meeting, March 1993, cited with the author's permission.

5 See Yang I-fan, “Hung-wu san-shih nien ‘Ta Ming lü’ kao k’ao,” *Hsüeh-hsi yü ssu-k’ao* (1981:5), pp. 50–54; Yang I-fan, “Ming ‘Ta kao’ ch’u-t’an,” *Pei-ching cheng fa hsüeh yüan hsüeh pao* (1981:1), pp. 54–62; Huang Chang-chien, “‘Ta Ming lü’ k’ao’ k’ao” (1953), rpt. in his *Ming Ch’ing shih yen-chiu ts’ung-kao* (Taipei, 1977), pp. 155–207.

6 Following Yang I-fan, “Hung-wu san-shih nien ‘Ta Ming lü’ kao’ k’ao,” p. 52.

7 On the emperor's use of placards, see Huang Chang-chien, “Ming Hung-wu Yung-lo ch’ao ti pang-wen chün-ling,” *Chung yang yen chiu yüan li shih yü yen chiu so chi k’an* 46, no. 4 (1975), pp. 557–94; rpt. in his *Ming Ch’ing shih yen chiu ts’ung kao*, pp. 237–86. For the placard cited here, see p. 245.

THE CHARACTER OF MING LAW

Because the founding emperor often proclaimed his own ad hoc commands and penalties in the form seen in the *Grand Pronouncements* and placards, the character of law in Ming times was hardly the simple product of formal codes. During his reign, the founding emperor was seeking to consolidate his power, and resorted to these provisional means to record and impose his will.

Later emperors, by contrast, particularly after the clearly illegitimate take-over by Yung-lo, needed to bolster their legitimacy by appearing to cling firmly to the founder's legal order. This meant that they could not promulgate written bodies of law according to their own whims. Instead, they had to support the myth that the code was a permanent legal basis for the dynasty. In doing so, they did not necessarily constrain themselves by the code, because, like the founder, they were above it. On the other hand, they could not continue to revise the code itself as the founder had done. The code had to remain constant and unchanging: providing a solid rock upon which to rest the myth of legitimate, fair, and just rule.

In consequence, the code was perceived from two perspectives. It was viewed as a repository of legal doctrine, valid for all time. It was also seen as a body of highly specific rules which constrained officials and set the conditions under which they were required to obtain imperial authorization for acts of administration. In the latter respect, the code eventually fell out of step with social and economic conditions as these changed radically during the 276 years of the dynasty's history.

To cope with changing circumstances, succeeding emperors issued ad hoc findings in response to memorials from officials, who presented their requests under guidelines found in the code and in other imperial promulgations. These ad hoc findings were called *li*, or precedents.⁸ As an uncoded and unsystematic body of law, the growing number of these enactments constituted a secondary type of legislation. Initially, these findings came into being as specific responses to concrete situations and were not seen as proactive legislation. These precedents, however, inadvertently established precedents for situations that arose later, and, to that extent, they were occasionally collected by officials under the rubric *l'iao li* (itemized precedents).

The first efforts made in this direction in Ming times were relatively informal and were not undertaken with imperial sponsorship. But, in 1500, the emperor Hsiao-tsung promulgated a work known as the *Wen hsing l'iao li*,

8 *Li* functioned as sub-statutes to the extent that they were formally secondary to the *lü*. For comments on the sub-statutes in Ch'ing legislation, see Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, *Law in imperial China, exemplified by 190 Ch'ing dynasty cases translated from the Hsing-an hui-lan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 63–68. The basic reference for Ming sub-statutes is Huang Chang-chien, *Ming-tai ti li li hui pien* (Taipei, 1979).

(*Itemized precedents for trying penal matters*). This was the first comprehensive and formal attempt in Ming times to give some order to the secondary legislation that had come into existence.⁹ Hsiao-tsung's reign has been called by some as a "restoration" of intelligent rule, and indeed his promulgation of the *Itemized precedents for trying penal matters* came about as the result of intense lobbying by some of the excellent officials whom he cultivated. This lobbying in turn was the fruit of debates stemming back to T'ai-tsu's crystallization of the fundamental conflict between the code and the ongoing needs of the law. T'ai-tsu had stated:

The laws and commandments are the implements for guarding the people and the methods for assisting governance. In these are the standard provisions (*ching*) and the ad hoc provisions (*ch'üan*). The code is the permanent standard provision, while the individual imperial decisions (*t'iao-li*) are the ad hoc measures taken to meet special exigencies.¹⁰

Debates about the conflict between the fixed code and the changing world appeared under Hsien-tsung, who upon his accession abolished a compilation of sub-statutes (*t'iao-li*) that had been compiled under his predecessor's reign.¹¹ The scholar Ch'iu Chün (1419?–95), in his famous *Ta hsüeh yen i pu* (*Supplement to the elucidation of the Great Learning*), also argued strenuously for a resolution of this conflict, in this case by a systematic review of the outstanding sub-statutes. Upon Hsiao-tsung's succession, he argued that Hanlin officials should "choose those [sub-statutes] that deserve forever to be upheld, simplify and clarify their language, summarize the essentials, and compile them in a classified book for promulgation that would circulate along with the code."¹² Other scholars who went on record in this debate before Hsiao-tsung included two ministers of justice, Ho Ch'iao-hsin (1427–1503)¹³ and P'eng Shao (1430–95).¹⁴

Law was understood to act primarily as a deterrent. The ancient Chinese ideal that "law would be employed so as to make its employment unneces-

9 A handy edition of the Wan-li period edition of this text, with Japanese commentary, is included in Ogyü Sorai (1666–1728), *Ritsurei taishō teihon Minritsu kokuji kai*, ed. Uchida Tomō and Hihara Toshikuni (Tokyo, 1966), pp. 555–859. This volume also contains the Chinese text of the Ming code and a valuable commentary in Japanese. See also a modern edition by Huai Hsiao-feng in *Ta Ming lü* (Beijing, 1990), which contains the Ming code, the *Wen hsing t'iao-li*, and the *Ta Ming ling*.

10 Quoted in Yang I-fan, "Hung-wu san-shih nien 'Ta Ming lü' k'ao," p. 54.

11 This was done at the behest of Wang Shu (1416–1508). See Wang Shu's memorial in Wang Ch'ü, ed., *Hsü wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao* (1586 ed.; rpt. Tai-pei, 1979), 168, pp. 7b–8a; Wang Shu's biography is in *DMB*, pp. 1416–20.

12 Ch'iu Chün, *Ta hsüeh yen i pu* (1488), included in his *Ch'iu Wen-chuang kung t'ung-shu* (Tai-pei, 1972), I, 106, p. 2a–b.

13 Biography in *DMB*, pp. 505–07; his memorial is reprinted in Huang Chang-chien, *Ming-tai lü-li hui-pien*, I, *hsü*, pp. 7–8.

14 Biography in *DMB*, pp. 1118–19; his memorial is reprinted in Huang, *Ming-tai lü-li hui-pien*, I, *hsü*, p. 10.

sary” (*hsing ch’i yü wu hsing*) summed up this aim.¹⁵ Laws were viewed as a set of definitions of punishments for wrongdoing. As a result of this understanding, the chief problem of Chinese jurisprudence in pre-modern times was to set punishments to fit crimes. Codes outlined the punishments for crimes, but because no code could anticipate all forms of misbehavior, codes were seen as limited but necessary bodies of procedures for addressing wrongdoing. The scope of wrongdoing addressed included official administrative misconduct, misconduct by nobles, and misconduct by common people. When misconduct involved different status groups, the severity of punishment was changed according to the relative status of the wrongdoer and that of his or her victim.

Consequently, the principal judicial act which the code addressed was the act of sentencing. Judges were required to cite the relevant article of the code when setting a provisional sentence for a criminal. When a given criminal act was not covered by a specific statute, the judge was permitted to cite another statute by analogy or indirectly, and thereby generate a rationale for a suggested punishment. In cases decided by analogy, however, judges were required by the code to obtain authorization for the recommended punishment directly from the throne. Thus, as far as Chinese judges were concerned, the doctrine of *nulla poena sine lege* or “no punishment without a law” may be said to have been in force.

Nulla poena sine lege is a doctrine of Western civil law which emerged fully in nineteenth-century Europe. It served as a check on the arbitrary power of the state. In China, however, this doctrine only seems to have served to check the power of officials, as it was expressly rejected with respect to the power of emperors.¹⁶

Because the Ming code, as any pre-modern Chinese code, did not intend to define criminality, we can understand an article in the Ming code which, at first glance, appears to define as criminal an act committed prior to its promulgation: “From the date beginning with the promulgation of the code, any criminal act committed earlier shall be sentenced according to the new code.”¹⁷ This code did not intend to define actions retroactively as criminal, but rather to change the punishment for actions which had already been deemed criminal.

15 This ideal, which first appeared in the *Book of Documents* (*Shang shu*), was widely quoted.

16 See Shüzō Shiga, “Criminal procedure in the Ch’ing dynasty – with emphasis on its administrative character and some allusion to its historical antecedents –,” *Memoirs of the research department of the Tōyō Bunko*, No. 32 (1974), pp. 1–45 and No. 33 (1975), pp. 115–38; esp. No. 32, p. 3 and No. 33, pp. 124–38.

17 TML article 45. (For the numbering of the articles in the Ming code, I follow the edition included in *Ritsurei taishō teibon Min ritsu kokujū kai*, cited earlier.)

Another article specifically addresses the problem of the code's limited capacity:

The code and commands cannot set provisions against all [criminal] acts. In sentencing someone for a criminal act, if the code does not provide a statute which is directly relevant, then [the judge] should cite an article for analogous application, increasing or reducing the severity of the punishment appropriately, and draft a provisional sentence accordingly. This should then be transmitted to the Ministry of Justice for discussion and finalization and memorialization to the throne. If in the [provisional] judgment the punishment is either too severe or too light, [the official responsible] shall be sentenced for deliberate error.¹⁸

The code thus provided the framework for analysis, and the judge was expected to apply the code analogously to cases where it lacked direct relevance. He was also subjected to a high standard of judgment, for, if his provisional sentence was found to be inappropriate, he himself faced punishment for "intentional error." In other words, the presumption, in a case of judicial error, was that it arose out of some ulterior or premeditated motive and was not merely the product of a lapse of judgment.

Nothing in the foregoing discussion of sentencing is unique to the Ming legal system, for the practice of sentencing by analogous reference to the code had existed since T'ang times or earlier.

The legal codes did not discuss a specific definition of criminality. What behavior was to be considered criminal was understood to be defined by common sense and Confucian learning. This is the rationale behind the "catch-all" statutes in the Ming code, of which the following is an example:

Anyone who does something which should not be done shall be sentenced to forty blows of the light stick. In serious cases, the sentence shall be eighty blows of the heavy stick.¹⁹

This catch-all provision was very ancient, dating back at least to the T'ang code.²⁰ It presumed general agreement about "what should not be done," and gave judicial authorities a limited degree of discretion in punishing less serious crimes.

These concepts regarding the law express the basic traditional understandings of it which underlay Ming founder's establishment of his own code.

What set the Ming apart from its predecessors was the Ming founder's firm desire to have his laws widely disseminated throughout the realm. Early in his reign, he ordered his officials to compile a vernacular commentary on those provisions of the code that bore most directly on the lives of the com-

¹⁸ TML, article 46. ¹⁹ TML, article 410.

²⁰ Article 450 in the *T'ang lü shu i* (Tai-pei, 1973) 27, p. 522.

mon people. This work, known as the *Lü ling chih chieh* (Straightforward explanation of the statutes and commands), promulgated in 1368, is not extant, but the emperor's concern that the law be disseminated is obvious. He declared that any person found guilty of a crime who possessed a copy of the *Grand Pronouncements* would have his punishment reduced. Furthermore, an article in the code itself requires officialdom to know the code well and charges the Censorate to test officials on it annually.²¹ These provisions were Ming innovations.

Later emperors occasionally endorsed the importance of disseminating the law. In 1404, for example, the Yung-lo emperor received a memorial from the Grand Court of Revision complaining about a merchant who was using a nonstandard steelyard in his transactions. The Grand Court of Revision wanted to punish the merchant by reference to the statute against "violating a command."²² The emperor asked whether a placard informing the people of the rule against the nonstandard measure had been posted. The reply was that while a rule to that effect had been issued to the officials in charge, no placard had yet been posted. The emperor said:

If the people know of a command, they will not violate it. If they then violate it, they will be punished. But to punish them when they have not been prohibited [from doing it] is inhumane. Release him.²³

We are tempted to doubt the records which make the emperor look like the guardian of the common peoples' welfare. After all, the *Veritable Records* of the founder's reign were carefully edited and revised at least two times.²⁴ The theme, however, appears often enough in a variety of materials that we are safe in believing that the emperor himself made an issue of it.

THE MING PENAL SYSTEM

The code details the various penalties that were to be used in sentencing, but in the section of the code devoted exclusively to this subject, some penalties authorized elsewhere in the code are omitted. This is perhaps because the formal section of the code dealing with the punishments merely copied the T'ang Code as a model and did not pretend to summarize the actual situation. Table 3.2 outlines the standard five punishments. Punishments not listed in

²¹ *TML*, article 63.

²² *TML*, article 409: "Anyone who violates a command shall be sentenced to fifty blows of the light stick."

²³ *Ming T'ai-tsu shih lu*, 28, pp. 505–06; quoted in Yang Hsüeh-feng, *Ming tai ti shen p'an chih tu* (Tai-pei, 1978), p. 317.

²⁴ Huang Chang-chien, "Tu Ming-k'an 'Yü-ch'ing hsün-i chi' suo-tsai Ming T'ai-tsu yü Wu-ting-hou Kuo Ying ch'ih-shu," 1963, rpt. in *Ming Ch'ing shih yen-chiu ts'ung-kao*, p. 142.

TABLE 3.2²⁵*The standard five punishments of the Ming code*

1. Beating with the light stick	10, 20, 30, 40, 50 strokes
2. Beating with the heavy stick	60, 70, 80, 90, 100 strokes
3. Penal servitude	1 year plus 60 blows of the heavy stick 1½ years plus 70 blows 2 years plus 80 blows 2½ years plus 90 blows 3 years plus 100 blows
4. Life exile	exile at 2,000 li plus 100 blows of a heavy stick exile at 2,500 li plus 100 blows exile at 3,000 li plus 100 blows
5. Death	strangulation decapitation

the formal table of the code appear elsewhere in the code. These included the most dreaded punishment of all, *ling-ch'ih* or death by slicing.²⁶ Also mentioned in the code, but not in the formal “five punishments” section, were *ch'ung-chün*, or military exile and *ch'ien-hsi*, or transportation – also a form of exile.²⁷

The Ming code provided that various kinds of punishments could be lifted by paying fines. These fines could be paid in lieu of the assigned punishments particularly for crimes designated *tsa fan ssu tsui* (miscellaneous capital crimes), which were nominal capital crimes as distinguished from *chen fan ssu tsui* (real capital crimes).²⁸ The latter were subject to the death penalties mentioned, while the former were redeemable by monetary payments or labor service. Virtually all of the standard noncapital five punishments were convertible to payments in copper cash, paper money, or labor service. The monetary conversion rates for those punishments were frequently adjusted during the course of the dynasty to reflect the changing values of money and commodities.

The punishment redemption privileges in Ming law were available to a wide range of people and amounted to system of fines for misbehavior.²⁹ One of the innovations of the Ming code was the extension of redemption privileges to women in cases involving penalties of penal servitude and exile.

²⁵ This table is based on *TML*, article 1.

²⁶ Death by slicing is prescribed in the code only in *TML*, article 277, “plotting rebellion.”

²⁷ For military exile (*ch'ung-chün*), see *TML*, articles 34 and 366; for transportation (*ch'ien-hsi*), see article 366.

²⁸ Miscellaneous capital crimes (*tsa fan ssu tsui*) were less serious than real capital crimes (*chen fan ssu tsui*), and were usually differentiated by the degree of intent to cause harm, the former being considered as having been done without such intent.

²⁹ See Bodde and Morris, *Law in imperial China*, pp. 78–80ff., for a discussion of monetary redemption in Ch'ing times.

That it may well have been enforced is testified to by the late Ch'ing commentator Hsüeh Yün-sheng: "The Ming code allowed universal redemption for women and so was generous and indulgent. No wonder female criminals increased by the day!"³⁰

The *Itemized precedents for trying penal matters* incorporated many provisions on redemptions in an attempt to provide order in that area of the law's application. In fact, many of the standard "five punishments" were converted into labor service in practice. For example, the punishments by beatings with light or heavy sticks, exile, and "miscellaneous capital crimes" were to be converted into labor services like transporting coal, charcoal, rice, bricks, and grain according to certain specified schedules. These conversions were partly intended to reduce the severity of the physical punishments, since many officials complained that the beatings and other punishments were overly harsh. Later editions of the code itself also stipulated cash payments in lieu of actual punishments.

Redemption privileges available to officials in Ming times, however, were reduced from those enjoyed in earlier times: a reduction that reflected the Ming founder's nearly obsessive concern with rooting out official misbehavior.³¹

The three judicial agencies

The penal system was administered by an elaborately articulated set of institutions,³² at the highest level of which were the three judicial agencies (*San fa ssu*) in the capital: the Ministry of Justice, the Censorate, and the Grand Court of Revision. In 1385, by order of the Ming founder, all three agencies were grouped together in a separate walled compound just outside the walls of the capital city, Nanking. The compound had a special name derived from a circle-shaped constellation of stars known as *kuan*, "string of cash." The name was explained by the emperor as referring to the circular nature of the constellation, inside of which other stars could occasionally be seen. According to the emperor, if stars were visible within the "string," it meant there were prisoners somewhere in the empire who had been unjustly imprisoned or tried. The compound was called *kuan-ch'eng* (walled compound of the string of cash) to symbolize the emperor's desire that innocent people

30 TML, article 19. See Hsüeh Yün-sheng, *T'ang Ming lü ho pien* (Taipei, 1977), hereafter TMLHP, pp. 37–8.

31 Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *Law and society in traditional China* (The Hague, 1965), p. 182. For a survey of Ming treatment of officials, see Lao Cheng-wu, *Lun T'ang Ming lü tui kuan jen chih yü yü* (Taipei, 1976).

32 See Yang Hsüeh-feng, *Ming tai ti shen p'an chih tu*, pp. 37–133; Charles O. Hucker, "Governmental organization of the Ming dynasty," *HJAS*, 21 (1958), pp. 1–66.

not be imprisoned.³³ When the capital was moved to Peking by the Yung-lo emperor, however, the founder's concept of *kuan-ch'eng* was abandoned.

The constitutional bases of these agencies were outlined in 1393 when a work known as the *Chu ssu chih chang* (*Government statutes*) was promulgated.³⁴ This work is a valuable source for understanding Ming organization as it stood at the end of the founder's reign.

The Ministry of Justice

The Ministry of Justice had been reorganized in 1390. At that time its operations were subdivided among twelve, and later, thirteen bureaus – one responsible for each province. The bureaus themselves were located in the capital. The *Government statutes* describes the functions of the ministry as follows:

The administrative roles of the minister and vice-minister are to take charge of penal matters in the empire, as well as of the administrative regulation concerning conscript laborers, trial review, and imprisonment.³⁵

After the 1390 reorganization, each of the four sections (*k'uo*) under each provincial division of the Ministry of Justice were put in nominal charge of different sections of the code. The four sections were called “laws” (*Hsien*), “reviews” (*pi*), “gates” (*Ssu-men*), and “capital officials” (*Tu-kuan*). The section of Laws was charged to oversee trials in general, the appointment of officials and lesser functionaries, and the accounting of official salaries and other income supplements. The section of Reviews was expected to oversee the collection of fines and the confiscation of illicit goods or booty in connection with criminal cases, as well as to review provisional sentences sent up for review in the capital. The section of Reviews was also required to prepare annual reports of sentences, detailing the number of persons sentenced to the various punishments during the review period.

The section of Gates had responsibility for prisoners sentenced to military service, generally on the frontiers. In this capacity, the section of Gates was required to review sentences on the basis of the rules made by the founder and published in the *Grand Pronouncements* and the code. The section of Gates was also in charge of the prison staffs of the empire. The Capital Officials section, however, had prison responsibilities too: in its case, over the care of pris-

33 Yang Hsüeh-feng, *Ming tai ti shen p'anchih tu*, p. 40; Ming T'ai-tsu, *Yü chih wen chi* (1535 woodblock ed., edited by Hsu Chiu-kao), 8.15a.

34 Chai Shan, comp., *Chu ssu chih chang*, (1393) rpt. in Chang Lu, ed., *Huang Ming chih shu* (1579; rpt. Tokyo, 1966–67), hereafter *CSCC*, Vol. 1, pp. 173–412.

35 *CSCC*, 5, p. 50a.

oners and their assignment to labor service. The Capital Officials section was charged as well with overseeing matters involving official corruption and malpractice.³⁶

The Censorate

The Censorate (*Tu ch' a yüan*) escaped the massive reorganization that had come about in the aftermath of the turbulence of 1380. It retained its original unitary character, unlike the military and civil administrations which were subdivided and neutralized as threats to the throne. The Censorate, however, was renamed, with the traditional designation *Yü-shih t' ai* (tribunal of censors) being replaced by the less prestigious title, chief surveillance office (*Tu ch' a yüan*). Its functions were described as follows:

The administrative duties of the two censors-in-chief and [two] vice censors-in-chief are to take exclusive charge of investigating and impeaching official wrongdoing, clarifying cases of injustice, overseeing each circuit [one for each province], and [looking into] all sorts of unjust and illegal practices. Under their aegis are twelve circuits of investigating censors (*chien-ch' a yü-shih*). Trials shall be dealt with by the appropriate circuit. [Each circuit] shall dispatch investigating censors to conduct inspection tours, and these shall investigate further, review cases, and check records.³⁷

The Grand Court of Revision

The Grand Court of Revision, described thus, was the third branch of the judicial triumvirate:

The two officers of this court have exclusive responsibility for reviewing trials of the empire. Whenever a sentence is too lenient, it shall be reversed in accordance with the code. In the event of injustice [i.e., an innocent person being sentenced for a crime], it shall clarify matters by pursuing the circumstances. Its aim shall be to punish only the guilty and to avoid harming the innocent.

Detailed provisions followed regarding its authority in rehearing cases first heard at lower levels of the government and by the Ministry of Justice, the Chief Military Commissions, and the Censorate.³⁸

Military judicial agencies

The Five Chief Military Commissions (*wu chün tu-tu fu*) were also empowered to try cases. Prior to 1380, the military hierarchy had a centralized administrative structure reporting directly to the throne. The break-up, in 1380, of

³⁶ For these descriptions, see *CSCC*, 5, pp. 53a–73a.

³⁷ *CSCC*, 6, p. 1a. ³⁸ *CSCC*, 6, p. 29a.

that structure into its five constituent parts, each answerable directly to the throne, cut the head off the military establishment and made it weaker *vis-à-vis* the throne, but the reorganization did not alter the centralization of judicial authority within the military. The military judges, known as *tuan-shih kuan*, bore the responsibilities outlined here:

The two judges have exclusive responsibility for overseeing the five Chief Military Commissioners, to adjudicate and sentence criminal cases involving Regional Military Commissions, Guards and Battalions, military officers, and military men who are under the command of the five [chief] military [commissions].³⁹

Provincial and local judicial powers

Provincial and local levels of judicial administration were relatively undifferentiated in functional terms. The lowest level was the *hsien*, or county, headed by a magistrate. This official's broad duties were summed up by the popular expression, "father and mother official." He had a wide spectrum of duties ranging from collecting taxes, to resolving disputes and presiding at trials. As a judge, his work frequently included investigation and fact finding, research into legal precedents, and even forensic work.⁴⁰ In Ming times, the number of districts was just under 1200. By law, the magistrate was never to be a native of the locale in which he served, and he was forbidden to buy property there.⁴¹ These restrictions on the magistrates were designed to promote objectivity in settling disputes and collecting taxes. A magistrate was assigned no more than six civil service assistants, appointed, like him, from outside the district; they, in turn, relied upon help from no more than a dozen locally recruited clerks.⁴²

Above the district level were the sub-prefectures and prefectures, whose officials reported to the provincial level. The provincial-level organizations in Ming times were rather complex, consisting of three parallel structures:

1. Regional Military Commissions, which were responsible to the five Chief Military Commissions in the capital;
2. Provincial Surveillance Offices (*T'i-hsing an-ch'a ssu*), answerable to the Censorate; and
3. Provincial Administration Offices (*Ch'eng-hsüan pu-cheng ssu*), which served as the principal civil administrative organs at the provincial level.

39 CCCC, 6, p. 37a; Hucker, "Governmental Organization," pp. 57–58, but he does not mention the military judges (*tuan-shih kuan*).

40 John Watt, *The district magistrate in Late Imperial China* (New York, 1972).

41 TML, article 100.

42 Ray Huang, 1587, *A year of no significance: The Ming dynasty in decline* (New Haven, 1981), p. 50; Hucker, "Chinese government," pp. 44–45.

By the 1430s, the provinces were being overseen by grand coordinators (*hsün-fu*), who were actually ad hoc agents of the throne sent out to observe and directly control the provincial administrations. The Yung-lo emperor started this practice of sending out coordinators as a way of extending his personal control over the realm.

Formally, however, provincial administration offices were headed by two administration commissioners. The structure that handled judicial matters within the formal organization of provincial administrations was specialized, to a degree, by function. Provincial administrations had both a Supervisorate of Judicial Proceedings (*Li-wen suo*) and a Prison Office (*Ssu-yü ssu*).⁴³

The Provincial Surveillance Office also served highly visible and relatively specialized judicial functions. The title in Chinese means “commissioner for checking punishments and examining cases.” Thus “they supervised the handling of litigations by the local magistrates and served as courts of appeal.”⁴⁴ They were authorized to try, on their own responsibility, officials of rank six or below; officials of higher rank could be tried by them only after authorization from the throne. Their officials also served as appeals and review judges in cases involving disputes over “households, marriage, landed property, money, and fights and suits (*ton-sung*).”⁴⁵

The regulations stipulated that such legal matters had to be dealt with through normal channels starting with the lowest court and working up. Trying to skip a step in the process was a punishable offense according to the code. In addition, as an adjunct to these functions, the Provincial Surveillance Office was required to examine local and provincial officials on their knowledge of the law code.⁴⁶

Other agencies with judicial functions

The Ming is well known for the irregular development of eunuch-dominated agencies. Eunuchs, acting as the personal representatives of emperors, acquired judicial functions and gained control over prisons and related facilities. These facilities included the Imperial Bodyguard (*Chin-iwei*), the Eastern Depot (*Tung ch'ang*), and the Western Depot (*Hsi ch'ang*).

The Imperial Bodyguard was the emperor's personal security agency. Established by the first Ming emperor in 1382, its members served as the emperor's agents when he personally presided over trials. Although the first

43 Hucker, “Chinese government,” pp. 41–43.

44 Hucker, “Chinese government,” p. 55.

45 *Hsien kang shih lei* (1371, rev. ed. 1439), rpt. in Chang Lu, ed., *Huang Ming chih shu* (1579; rpt. 2 vols., Tokyo, 1966–67) 15, pp. 8a–b.

46 *Hsien kang shih lei*, 15, pp. 8a–b, 15, pp. 14b–15a.

emperor had apparently not intended that court eunuchs acquire substantial political powers, his reliance upon them and the importance they assumed gave the Imperial Bodyguard the basis for gaining great power under later emperors who were less inclined to curb their powers. The Imperial Bodyguard was commanded by the emperor's trusted eunuchs, and it cooperated closely with the Directorate of Ceremonial (*Ssu-li chien*), a eunuch-run court agency, and the so-called Eastern Depot, probably founded in 1420. The "depot" was really a staging ground for aggressive extensions of the eunuchs' power into the realm. Later in the dynasty, a counterpart known as the Western Depot was founded and functioned similarly.⁴⁷

These eunuch-dominated organizations had judicial powers chiefly over matters that directly threatened imperial interests. The definition of what comprised a threat was naturally subject to considerable variation and abuse. At times, therefore, the eunuch agencies were able to tyrannize officialdom. The official history of the Ming dynasty, compiled in early Ch'ing times, details the history of these abuses and depicts much of the dynasty as a dark age or reign of terror.⁴⁸

Because the emperor was the supreme judge, he needed reliable sources of information. Owing to the polarization between the inner and outer courts in imperial Chinese rule, emperors often felt they could safely rely only upon agents directly responsible to the inner court in order to get the information they needed to rule. These agents were the eunuchs, whose numbers grew large towards the end of the dynasty. The emperors' increasing tendency to rely upon eunuchs in administration was exacerbated by the first emperor's distrust of outer court officials and by his abolition of the Secretariat (*Chung-shu sheng*) in 1380. This act left the main civil administration without a formal head, and, in turn, placed a large burden on the throne. To help the emperor sustain this burden, eunuch agencies were called on to gather information and to conduct tours of investigation.

The unchecked and arbitrary nature of imperial rule was aided by the imperial bodyguard, as previously noted. A revealing example of this occurred during the brief reign of the Hung-hsi emperor. Although he generally was inclined to leniency as a ruler, he was impulsive and apt to fly into rages in response to criticism from his officials. He once grew angry at a Han-lin Academy official who had presumed to advise him against intimacy with his concubines while he was still technically in mourning for his late father.

47 Ting I, *Ming tai t'eu cheng chih* (Pei-ching, 1951); Charles O. Hucker, *The censorial system of Ming China* (Stanford, 1966), pp. 44-45, 111-12 ff.

48 See the "treatise on penal law" (*hsing-fa chih*) in *MS*. To a certain extent, the *Ming shih* exaggerates the eunuch abuses, partly to make the transition to the Ch'ing period look legitimate.

The emperor retaliated by demoting the offending official and having him incarcerated in the Imperial Bodyguard's prison. The poor man was still in prison a year after the emperor's death.⁴⁹ An emperor needed no rationale to mistreat a person in such a manner, save perhaps his own paranoid definition of *lèse-majesté*. The Imperial Bodyguard was close at hand to do the emperor's bidding.

Under Shih-tsung, who came to the throne when the deceased emperor – his cousin – left no heir, eunuch abuses became extremely flagrant. The emperor rarely held audience, ruling instead through the intermediation of his trusted eunuchs. Once the Directorate of Ceremonial gained control over the Eastern Depot in 1549, the eunuchs gained virtually complete control over the judicial apparatus, acting as the emperor's agents of terror and dominating the officials at court for many years.⁵⁰ Chang Chü-cheng (1525–82), the prominent statesman of a later reign, reflected on the era as follows:

During the Chia-ching reign, the emperor ruled by terror, holding numerous great trials. Whenever the officials at court offended the throne, they would be arrested by the Imperial Bodyguard for torture or beaten right in court, some dying in their tracks. Those in charge were measured by their ability to cudgel, while the investigators and guards were as fierce as a mother tiger. If for a moment one did not follow their wishes, there was no telling what awful fate would befall them. The [people in the] capital city bemoaned this.⁵¹

MING LEGAL PROCEDURE

Although the emperors were capable of acting irregularly and uncontrollably, officials were formally obliged to follow elaborate rules of procedure. Failure to abide by these rules was a punishable offense. The *Great Ming code* was the first code in imperial China to devote a special section to procedures involved in “accusations and suits.” However, the twelve articles in that section are only a few of the many articles devoted to procedural considerations, both in the Ming code and in other promulgations. The *Government Statutes*, for example, contains important procedural regulations. In Ming law, procedural regulations were aimed chiefly at ensuring accuracy and justice and at preventing official misconduct.

An example of these concerns is provided by the section on “trials and provisional sentences” (*wen-ni hsing-ming*) in the *Government Statutes* pertaining to the activities of the Laws (*Hsien*) section of the Ministry of Justice. This sec-

49 Hucker, *Censorial system*, p. 113.

50 Huai Hsiao-feng, *Chia-ching chuan-chib cheng-chib yü fa-chib* (Ch'ang-sha, Hunan, 1989).

51 Chang Chü-cheng, *Chang T'ai-yüehwen-chi*, 12, “Chu kung shen-tao pei.” Quoted in Huai Hsiao-feng, *Chia-ching chuan-chib cheng-chib yü fa-chib*, p. 159.

tion of the *Statutes* begins by detailing the record-keeping requirements with respect to accusations. It then proceeds to discuss the disposition of the accuser and the accused and to describe how the hearing should be conducted. At the hearing, it states, the judge first was to examine the accuser to determine the reasons for the accusation. Then, the accused was to be examined. If the latter did not admit to the charges made against him, the witnesses were to be examined. If the witnesses' testimony supported the accusation, the accused was to be questioned again. If the parties continued to present differing stories, the judge was directed to question them all together, heeding the following advice:

Observe their expressions; listen carefully to their manner of speaking. If someone's speech is defiant or his expression unmoving, then he is telling the truth. But if he speaks in a stilted or forced manner, then he is dissembling. In this way one can get a rough idea of the truth. Afterwards employ the light stick to obtain confirmation.

If the person so examined still failed to confirm the facts, then the judge could employ the heavy stick:

Carefully probe for the truth of the matter. If it is a case of a serious crime where the evidence of corruption is perfectly manifest, yet he deliberately remains defiant and does not confess, then employ torture in the questioning.⁵²

By this was meant the application of judicial torture instruments. These commonly included the light and heavy sticks, just mentioned, plus a third, larger stick used against the back of the legs. Other tortures were used as well, although they are not mentioned in the code. These included the whip, which was approved in the *Itemized precedents for trying penal matters* edition of 1590, and many others which were disapproved (the finger press, branding, whipping the spine, the skull crusher, and other instruments).⁵³

Once the facts were affirmed through confession, the details were to be fully recorded and entered in a file. A provisional sentence was then to be drafted, outlining the facts. In the case of capital punishment, penal servitude, or exile, a memorial recommending the provisional punishment had to be presented to the throne. In the event that the provisional sentence called for a punishment of a beating with the light or heavy stick, however, it was merely necessary to draft an official communication ordering the execution of the sentence. The memorial recommending the sentence of servitude, exile, or death was sent with the prisoner to the Grand Court of Revision for review. If the Grand Court of Revision took no issue with the sentence, the recom-

⁵² CCCC, 5, pp. 53b–55a.

⁵³ Yang, *Ming tai ti shen p'an chih tu*, pp. 256–66; Huang, *Ming tai lu li bui pien*, pp. 975–79, 1003–04.

mendation was automatically memorialized to the throne for disposition while the prisoner was kept in custody. Once the imperial authorization was received, sentences were executed by the appropriate agencies detailed in the rules.

False accusations and homicide

The code contained a section devoted primarily to accusations and bravely attempted to create legal disincentives to the lodging of false accusations.⁵⁴ Under these rules, anyone who brought an accusation to a judicial authority higher than was appropriate was subject to a punishment of fifty strokes of the light stick.⁵⁵ Anyone who presented an unsigned accusation would receive a sentence of strangulation, and anyone who discovered an unsigned accusation was expected to burn it immediately. Anyone other than the original author who presented an accusation to the authorities would receive eighty blows of the heavy stick. Also, any official who accepted and acted upon such a third-party accusation would receive one hundred blows of the heavy stick. The accused party in such a case would not be held liable for the alleged crime even if he was otherwise guilty. Furthermore, a reward of ten taels of silver was to be granted to anyone who arrested and delivered into custody the author of such an accusation.⁵⁶

The heart of the Ming code's effort to curb false accusations is contained in an article with this very title, *wu kao* (false accusation).⁵⁷ Seemingly recognizing that the officials themselves had to be properly disciplined if the empire at large was to be well ordered, the Ming code provides punishments for officials who failed to accept accusations properly. "False accusations" was an active section of the code, judging by the number of sub-statutes issued on the subject in the *Itemized precedents for trying penal matters* of 1500.⁵⁸ Under the code and sub-statutes, false accusation was punished heavily. Anyone who brought an accusation to a court ran the risk of being severely beaten if he could not persuade the court that he was right. The intention of the code was clearly to deter people from abusing the accusation procedure merely to harass their enemies. However, it seems equally clear that this article could well have inhibited people from bringing truthful accusations, for it placed the accuser in the position of prosecutor and investigator. The court could simply rule that an accusation was implausible and throw it out. In practice,

⁵⁴ TML, articles 355–356. ⁵⁵ TML, article 355.

⁵⁶ TML, article 356. ⁵⁷ TML, article 359.

⁵⁸ Huang, *Ming tai xi lu li hui pien*, pp. 871–80.

it has been pointed out, the courts tended to administer the harsh aspects of this article leniently when the sincerity and good intentions of the accuser were not in doubt.⁵⁹

Provisions against false accusation had appeared in earlier law codes. The T'ang code included several articles on the subject.⁶⁰ The basic provision of these articles was the imposition of "reciprocal" punishment (*fan-tso*), under which a false accuser suffered the very punishment the accused would have suffered if the accusation had been true. The Ming code made the punishments for false accusation more severe than those in the T'ang code. For example, if the accusation concerned a crime that would normally have been punished by the light stick, the false accuser would receive that very punishment *increased* by two degrees of severity. If it was a punishment with the heavy stick, penal servitude, or exile, it would be increased by three degrees of severity. The maximum penalty was one hundred blows of the heavy stick and exile to a distance of 3,000 *li*.

The Ming code went into more detail than the T'ang code. It anticipated the possibility that a falsely accused person might, because of a false accusation, already have suffered the injustice of punishment for a crime he never committed. It provided these concrete hypothetical cases as examples:

- If the falsely accused person had been sentenced to penal servitude or exile, the false accuser was required to bear the costs of the victim's return travel expenses and was subject to increased punishment.
- If the falsely accused had sold or mortgaged landed property as a result of the false accusation, the false accuser was required to redeem the property and return it to the victim. If, however, the false accuser was too poor to make the recompense required by the preceding terms, and if he had no property which could be mortgaged, then he would suffer only the basic penalty increased by three degrees of severity.
- If a victim had a first-degree mourning relative who had accompanied him into penal servitude or exile who had died as a result of the journey, the false accuser would be sentenced to strangulation ("a life for a life"), and half his property would be turned over to the person falsely accused.
- If the falsely accused person had been executed as punishment for the alleged crime, the false accuser was to be executed himself.

⁵⁹ Shiga, "Criminal procedure in the Ch'ing dynasty," *Memoirs of the research department of the Toyo Bunko*, No. 33 (1975), pp. 116-17.

⁶⁰ *T'ang lü shu i*, articles 341-44.

- If an accused person who had been sentenced to death had not yet been executed, then the false accuser would be sentenced to one hundred blows of the heavy stick, exile at a distance of 3,000 li, and hard labor for three years.

In addition, the article on false accusation stipulated that if a falsely accused person should counterattack by falsely accusing his accuser, then he would suffer the consequences outlined in the main provisions of this article; and the original false accuser would not be required to pay the return travel expenses or turn over half his property as specified in the article.

Other provisions of the article dealt with accusations about multiple criminal acts which varied in severity and in which one accusation may have been true, but the other(s) false. No penalty was imposed on the accuser if the most serious crime he alleged proved to be accurate, even if the others were not. False accusations against more than one person were also dealt with. Finally, if an appeal was recklessly brought by relatives of a prisoner who had admitted his guilt, the relatives could be punished.

The Ming code is the first Chinese code to treat homicide as a special legal category, for while previous codes dealt with the crime, none had elevated the subject to a section of its own.⁶¹ In addition to covering much of the same ground as the earlier codes, the twenty articles on homicide in the Ming code⁶² provide the judge with more refined tools for sentencing. The articles begin with “intentional homicide” and add to the discussion considerations of motive, such as greed, on which earlier codes had not focused. Furthermore, the articles detail the issues to consider in connection with various forms of homicide, as well as devoting a significant amount of space to homicide in connection with adultery. In general, the effect of this section is to elevate the seriousness of the crime by strengthening the judge’s ability to sentence perpetrators properly.

Procedural regulations

The Ming code’s provisions on trial and imprisonment⁶³ also contain procedural regulations worth noting, as well as positive norms to be upheld in trying and punishing prisoners. Regarding prison officials, for example, the code provided that they were to be punished:

61 *TMLHP*, pp. 397–99. Geoffrey MacCormack, *Traditional Chinese penal law* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 19–20; Geoffrey MacCormack, “The T’ang and Ming law of homicide,” *Revue internationale des droits de l’antiquité*, 35 (1988), pp. 27–78. T’ang code provisions on homicide are scattered among the sections on violence and robbery, assaults and accusations.

62 *TML*, articles 305–24. 63 *TML*, articles 419–47.

- If they failed to imprison those who were supposed to be imprisoned,⁶⁴ or
- If they intentionally imprisoned or tortured innocent people, tortured people excessively, or tortured people who were exempt from torture,⁶⁵ or
- If they kept people imprisoned longer than necessary, delaying the actual execution of a sentence. The code stipulated that a sentence had to be executed within three days of the final decision authorizing it, and that a prisoner sentenced to exile or penal servitude had to be sent thereto within ten days.⁶⁶

Prison officials were obliged by the code to care properly for their charges. If they mistreated them, either through physical abuse or through failure to provide food and medical care, they were liable to punishment.⁶⁷ The Ming code declared it illegal for prison officials to give pointed instruments to prisoners to enable their escape.⁶⁸ Why such an obvious rule was included is puzzling. Less puzzling, perhaps, is the law prohibiting prison officials from inciting prisoners to reverse their testimonies (*fan-i*).⁶⁹ Reversal of testimony amounted to retracting a confession and led to an automatic appeal. What this law attempted to prevent was the launching of groundless appeals by prisoners who were really guilty.

Regarding trial procedure, people seventy years of age or older and those fifteen years old and younger, the infirm and the handicapped, and those persons eligible for special consideration, could not be tortured. The law specified that in cases involving such persons, the trial had to depend solely upon evidence supplied by witnesses; torture could not be used to elicit confessions or to corroborate facts.⁷⁰

Another article authorized trial officials to extradite individuals from other jurisdictions who were implicated in crimes which the trial officials were hearing, unless the distance was greater than 300 *li*. Persons so implicated had to be delivered to the court within three days of the receipt of the summons. Delays were punished by beatings with the light stick. In the case of two or more people being involved in a crime and resident in two or more counties (*hsien*), the rules governing extradition also required that the trial jurisdiction be set at the county in which the person whose crime was greater was located. If the crime involved a large number of people, then the trial would be moved to the county in which the majority of the suspects were located.⁷¹

Trial officials were not permitted to use accusations against people as an excuse to probe into other unrelated crimes. The code specified that only the

64 *TML*, article 419.

66 *TML*, article 421.

68 *TML*, article 423.

70 *TML*, article 428.

65 *TML*, article 420.

67 *TML*, article 421.

69 *TML*, article 424.

71 *TML*, article 429.

offense alleged in the original accusation could be tried. If, however, an unrelated crime was discovered while making an arrest or while searching in response to an accusation, the second crime could then be investigated and tried as well.⁷²

It was normal during a trial to detain both the accuser and the accused. According to the law, however, if an accuser was detained after the facts had been confirmed and the accused had confessed, the officials involved were punishable by beating with the light stick. The code, in short, obliged officials to release an accuser immediately once his presence became technically unnecessary.⁷³

An important procedural rule governed the sequence of actions that could be taken by officials to enforce sentences, and required mandatory review by higher levels in serious cases.⁷⁴ Once a trial was concluded, with the facts having been made completely clear, and once related investigations and the confiscation of bribes and illicit goods were completed, then, in cases involving penal servitude, exile, or less serious sentences, the prefecture, sub-prefecture, and district officials could enforce the sentence. In cases involving the death penalty, however, the investigating censors (in a Peking case) and the Provincial Surveillance Office (in a case tried outside the capital) automatically reviewed the case. This review or appeal was supposed to determine whether there had been a miscarriage of justice or not. According to the code, the review judges were required to “comment on the draft sentence in accordance with the code.” Their review was then transmitted to the Ministry of Justice for a final study. The results of this study by the ministry, which amounted to yet another appeal hearing, were then transmitted to the emperor in a memorial. If the emperor granted approval, the sentence was to be executed. In the metropolitan regions, the Ministry of Justice was to deputize an official to join with the Provincial Surveillance Office, and together they would oversee the execution (*shen chüeh*).

This same article also provided for situations in which a prisoner retracted his confession, effectively bringing on an automatic re-hearing. A re-hearing could also be brought on by a family member’s allegation of injustice. In either event, the case was reopened. If an injustice was found to have occurred, the case was sent back to the original trial officials for correction. In addition, if a case had been concluded and all the procedures prior to the execution had taken place, yet execution had been delayed for no good reason, the responsible officials were liable to severe punishment (sixty blows of the heavy stick).

⁷² TML, article 430. ⁷³ TML, article 431.

⁷⁴ TML, article 435.

These provisions were innovations of the Ming.⁷⁵ The Ming also went beyond previous eras to institutionalize the mandatory review of death penalties by the emperor: a procedure known as the court assizes (*ch'ao shen*). The court assizes was instituted in 1459 as a result of an edict issued the previous autumn. The court assizes consisted of a review of capital cases by judges nominated through a memorial to the throne by the three judicial agencies; it was held each year after the fall frost. In Ch'ing times, this practice was commonly known as the autumn assizes (*ch'iu-shen*).⁷⁶

Provisions regarding women

The Ming code incorporated several provisions regarding women that must be regarded as relatively advanced compared to those of previous eras. The T'ang code had incorporated prohibitions against the use of torture to interrogate women who were pregnant. It had also provided the rule that a pregnant woman found guilty of a capital offense could not be executed until one hundred days after the delivery of her baby.⁷⁷ The Ming code retained similar provisions but went beyond them to shield women, in most cases from the dangers inherent in imprisonment. One article in the code is solely devoted to crimes by women (*fu-jen fan-tsu*). Basically, it combines the provisions of the two articles in the T'ang code devoted to women, but adds an important provision not found in the T'ang code.⁷⁸

According to the Ming article on crimes by women, a woman who committed a crime other than a sexual crime or a crime deserving the death penalty was to be remanded to the custody of her husband. If she had no husband, then she was to be remanded to the custody of relatives within the mourning relationship or to nearby neighbors. The point seems to have been to keep women out of the prisons, where a woman was exposed to the danger of rape.

Marriage law, as defined in the Ming code, may also be considered somewhat more enlightened than T'ang practice. According to T'ang law, when a man's family regretted a betrothal and backed out unilaterally, it was not punished; but, if the woman's family backed out, her family members could be punished by up to sixty blows of the heavy stick. The T'ang code even noted that the man's family was exempted from punishment.⁷⁹ The Ming code, by contrast, punished whichever side unilaterally withdrew from a marital agreement.⁸⁰

75 TMLHP, p. 688.

76 TMLHP, p. 688; Bodde and Morris, *Law in imperial China*, pp. 134-45.

77 *T'ang li shu* i, articles 493 and 494. 78 TML, article 444.

79 *T'ang li shu* i, article 175. 80 TML, article 107; TMLHP, pp. 276-77.

The Ming code expanded the legal definition of the family insofar as family relations could bear upon punishments meted out by the court.⁸¹ At the same time, the law had to be interpreted and sometimes appealed to before it could adequately protect a woman's position. Often the law was not enforced at lower levels.

An anecdotal commentary on the degree to which the law protected a woman's position is afforded by a case that arose in 1452. In that year, the minister of war Wang Chi (1378–1460)⁸² appealed directly to the throne to reverse a biased judicial decision. According to Wang's memorial,⁸³ a certain Lü Ying, the son of a military commissioner-in-chief, had early designated or betrothed the younger sister of Ko T'an as his wife. Ko T'an was a guard commander. Before he could actually marry Ko, Lü Ying was transferred to Shan-hai Garrison in the north, where he took another woman as his wife. This was the daughter of Yü Sheng, a chiliarch. He also took the woman Ch'en as his concubine. In his marriage to the women Yü and Ch'en, Lü Ying fathered a son and a daughter. Meanwhile, the original bride-to-be, the woman Ko, had reached the age of thirty and was, by then, the wife of a certain Liu Yü, himself a chiliarch, and the mother of his three children. Lü Ying, however, apparently still desired the woman Ko, and attempted to claim her as his wife (technically concubine), on the ground that she had been betrothed to him years before. The lower court, where Lü brought his accusation, agreed with Lü and commanded the woman Ko to leave her husband and three children to become the concubine of her original prospective husband, Lü Ying.

The memorialist, however, objected strongly to this ruling and took the matter directly to the throne. He argued that the lower court's ruling "not only despoils both her honor and her virtue, but it makes it impossible for her to be a noblewoman [i.e., the wife of a military officer]. And what is worse, it is pitiable to separate a mother from her children, a wife from her husband." The memorialist thereupon begged the emperor to order that the case be reheard by the Ministry of Rites and that her "re-marriage" to the chiliarch Liu Yü be allowed to stand.

The issue argued at court, however, was not that Lü Ying had arbitrarily broken a marital agreement, but whether Ko, the woman, had remarried illegally. This was at issue regardless of the fact that her original prospective spouse had apparently abandoned her, rather than she, him. The case leaves one with the impression that womens' marital rights were not well protected

81 Makino Tatsumi, "Minritsu ni okeru shinzoku han'i no kakudai," *Chūgoku kazoku kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1941; rpt. Tokyo, 1970), Vol. 2, pp. 83–106.

82 Biography in *MS*, 171. 83 Recorded in *TMLHP*, p. 278.

by this article of the code. At the same time, however, it reminds us that these issues were taken so seriously that they could, and often were, taken to the highest levels of the judicial system before they were resolved.

The Ming was similar to other pre-modern eras in China in subordinating the wife to the husband. Severe punishments are prescribed in all the early codes for women who committed violent acts against their husbands or their husbands' families. The most severe punishment of all, death by slicing, is prescribed in the Ming code for a woman who intentionally killed her husband.⁸⁴ The normal penalty for intentionally killing someone was decapitation,⁸⁵ and indeed, if a husband beat his wife to death, the penalty was strangulation.⁸⁶ If, however, he did so for what was then considered good reason (if, for example, she had reviled his parents), he was punished merely by one hundred blows of the heavy stick.⁸⁷

Thus, a wife was subject to greater penalties for misbehavior directed against her husband than the converse, and a wife who committed a criminal act was in many cases remanded to her husband's custody. The law placed a high premium on maintaining the "natural" hierarchy of male over female.⁸⁸ At the same time, however, it attempted to prevent wives from being treated as mere chattels by their husbands. An article in the code makes it illegal for a man to pawn his wife, concubine, or daughter to another man as a wife or concubine. If one married off one's wife or concubine to another person on the pretext that the woman was one's sister, one was also subject to punishment. A party to any of these transactions who was aware of the woman's actual status was also liable to punishment, and any money involved would be confiscated by the court. The woman was not liable.⁸⁹

These provisions are, for the most part, not found in the T'ang code,⁹⁰ a fact which indicates the Ming code's general tendency to extend the meaning of "family relationships" beyond the classic limits set by the mourning degrees. Under T'ang law, the punishment for injuries inflicted on a person was increased if the victim happened to be within the "five mourning" degrees. Under Ming law, however, the punishment was increased merely if the victim happened to be a relative; it did not matter if the relative was outside the bounds of the five mourning degrees.

84 *TML*, article 338. 85 *TML*, article 313.

86 *TML*, article 338. 87 *TML*, article 316.

88 This theme is stressed in Ch'ü, *Law and society in traditional China*, p. 102 ff.

89 *TML*, article 108.

90 *TMLHP*, p. 282, suggests that they were introduced in the Yüan period.

Sexual crimes

The law on sexual crimes in Ming times reflects a similar change in attitude and differs markedly from T'ang law. The Ming article on "killing an adulterer" specified that a husband who killed his wife and her illicit sexual partner was not to be punished if the killing occurred immediately upon the husband's discovery of the couple *in flagrante delicto*. If only the adulterer was killed, then the wife was subject to the standard punishment for adultery, and her husband was allowed to sell her, at his discretion, to another man as a concubine.⁹¹ These provisions do not appear in T'ang law. Apparently, such provisions were introduced into Chinese law in Yüan times, but it was under the Ming that they were incorporated into the law code as statutes.⁹² A Ming period commentary to the Ming code elaborates on the interpretation and enforcement of these provisions.⁹³ If a husband discovered his wife and her illicit sexual partner *in flagrante delicto*, but killed only his wife, letting the adulterer get away, then he would be punished in accordance with the statute on killing a wife. Similarly, if he arrived at the scene of the illicit act and caught the adulterer outside the room, not in the sexual act itself, and then killed him, the husband would be punished by blows of the heavy stick on the basis of the statute against "doing what should not be done." If a long time had elapsed between the adulterous act and the husband's apprehension and killing of the adulterer (if, for example, the husband caught him on the highway or on the following day), then the husband would be sentenced under the statute for intentional killing (*ku-sha*). The implicit reasoning behind this statute seems to be that a husband could not be expected to control his emotions at the moment he discovered his wife in bed with another man. It is curious, however, that the law required the husband to kill both parties in order to avoid punishment.

Driving someone to commit suicide

The Ming code considered driving a person to suicide a crime.⁹⁴ There seems to be no precedent for this provision in earlier codes. The punishment for this offense was set at one hundred blows of the heavy stick. If an official, not on public business, drove a common person to commit suicide, the official was liable to this punishment, and he was additionally required to pay burial expenses (*mai-tsang yin*) to the victim's family. The punishment for driving a second-degree mourning relation (*chi-ch'in*) to death was strangulation. If

91 *TML*, article 308. 92 *TMLHP*, p. 404.

93 This is from a "small note" to the code, quoted in *TMLHP*, p. 403.

94 *TML*, article 322.

through robbery or adultery, someone was induced to commit suicide, the punishment was decapitation. A commentary to this article explained that its interpretation was quite broad. For example, if someone approached another's house and made loud threatening noises like an armed robber, causing the panicked householder to commit suicide, then that person was liable for punishment even if he had never entered the victim's house. An even more far-fetched example was provided: if a thief was chased by a homeowner and his friends and the homeowner or one of his friends fell and died in the *mêlée*, then the thief was held liable for punishment under this statute for "causing someone to commit suicide."⁹⁵

What would happen if someone drove a first-degree mourning relation to commit suicide? The code did not specifically address this possibility. We know, however, of a Ming case that settled the question. In 1503, the Chiang-hsi bureau of the Ministry of Justice memorialized the throne concerning the case of one Chiang Yüan-i, who had fought with his younger brother, Chiang Yüan-ssu, over some grain, and killed him with an instantly fatal blow to the forehead. The case was not reported to the authorities, but came to light only later, when the mother committed suicide. It seems that one day – long after Chiang's murder of his brother – Chiang Yüan-i was pressed to repay a loan by someone, and went to his mother to demand that she turn over a portion of the money received by the family as a gift on the occasion of the betrothal of his younger brother's daughter. The mother refused, whereupon Chiang Yüan-i reviled her, and took the money against her will. She hanged herself in desperation, having been "unable to bear her rage." The lower court suggested a provisional sentence of death by strangulation for Chiang Yüan-i in accordance with the article on sons who revile their mothers.⁹⁶ The Chiang-hsi bureau grand coordinator Wang Che (1457–1513), who reviewed the case, held that strangulation was too lenient a punishment for such a despicable character:

[Chiang] Yüan-i killed his brother with his own hands and drove his own mother to her death. If he should be allowed to keep his head and neck in one piece, then this would be an instance of a severe crime punished lightly.

Wang Che wanted the man's head, but the difficulty in justifying decapitation was that the article on driving a person to commit suicide did not specify a punishment for someone whose victim happened to be a first-degree mourning relation. Similarly, killing one's brother did not call for decapitation. There was, therefore, no legally provided way a judge could draft a sentence of decapitation for Chiang Yüan-i, save by deriving a punishment by means

95 *TMLHP*, p. 426. 96 *TML*, article 352.

of analogy. Wang's solution, therefore, was to recommend to the throne that Chiang Yüan-i's sentence be decided by analogy to the statute on beating a parent, for which the punishment was decapitation.⁹⁷ In his memorial to the throne, Wang Che added that judicial officials throughout the empire should be informed that this was thenceforth to be the binding law of the land. The emperor accepted the recommendation.⁹⁸

Economic crimes

Economic crimes were dealt with more thoroughly in the Ming code than in earlier codes. This reflected the changes in land tenure and economy that had taken place since Sung times. The state, of course, had an interest in controlling land transactions and land tenure in order to preserve its fiscal revenues. The practice requiring that land transactions be registered and sale contracts be stamped by the authorities for a fee began long before the Ming period. The Ming code explicitly incorporated these requirements in statute. Under Ming law, no mortgage or sale contract on land was valid until the transaction tax (*shui ch'i*) was paid and until the new owner of the farming rights was registered with the tax authorities.⁹⁹ The code did not specify the rate of the transaction tax, but it was traditionally set at 4 percent of the sale.¹⁰⁰

The punishments for failure to comply with this article were clearly laid out and were imposed on the seller. The penalty for failure to pay the transaction tax was fifty strokes of the light stick and confiscation of fifty percent of the sale price. If the tax liability was not properly transferred (a process known as *kuo-ko*), the punishment was proportionate to the size of the property. For one to five *mu* of land,¹⁰¹ the punishment was forty strokes of the light stick; for every additional five *mu*, the penalty was increased by one degree until the maximum penalty of one hundred strokes of the heavy stick was reached. In all cases, the land involved was turned over to the authorities for disposition. Since these punishments were less than penal servitude or exile, they could be enforced by the local magistrates without review.

Mortgage sales specified time limits after which the property was supposed to be redeemed by repayment of the money loaned against it. During the period of the mortgage, the original owner became a tenant on his own land,

97 TML, article 342.

98 For excerpts from Wang's memorial, see Huang, *Ming tai lü li hui pien*, p. 817; TMLHP, p. 428.

99 TML, article 101.

100 Liu Ch'ung-jih and Wu Hsin-li, "Yen-chiu feng-chien she-hui ti pao-kui tzu-liao: Ming Ch'ing ch'ao-pen 'Tsu ti pu' liang chung," *Wen hsien*, No. 3 (October 1980), pp. 143-58. For a survey, see Niida Noboru, *Chügoku böseishi*, expanded ed. (Tokyo, 1963), pp. 306-11.

101 One *mu* was roughly equivalent to a third of an acre.

and the land tax obligation was shifted to the mortgagor. The code enforced the provisions for redemption by setting punishments for mortgagors who refused to permit redemption at the time specified in the mortgage contract. It also protected mortgagees who did not have the means to redeem their property at the specified time: it exempted them from punishment under the terms of this statute.

Later sub-statutes detailed the protection afforded mortgagees who could not raise the money to redeem their land. The *Itemized precedents for trying penal matters* of 1500 permitted the mortgagee to farm the land as tenant for two more years. Furthermore, during the period of the mortgage, the interest charged by the mortgagor was limited to a maximum of 100 percent of the value of the property.¹⁰²

The law on debts also received comparatively detailed treatment in the Ming code. In particular, the code sought to establish limits on rates of interest that could be charged. Those limits were provided for landed property mortgage sales in one statute and for private loans in another.¹⁰³ The highest interest that could be charged under the code was 3 percent per month. The total interest collected over the life of the loan could not exceed 100 percent of the amount borrowed. The punishment for violation of this rule was set at forty strokes of the light stick, with the excess interest collected treated as illicit goods and confiscated. The collector was punished up to a maximum of one hundred strokes of the heavy stick. Similarly, the code established punishments for failure to repay a debt. A three-month lateness in repayment, for example, in the case of a debt of five strings of cash or less, would be punished by ten blows of the light stick; the punishment was increased as the size of the debt and period of lateness increased.¹⁰⁴

Another area of the economy regulated under the code was the public marketplace. The code established punishments for attempts to monopolize a marketplace by improper methods. For example, sellers who combined their forces to bribe brokers and to control prices were to be punished by eighty blows of the heavy stick. If someone deliberately caused trouble to a seller of goods by setting up nearby with similar goods at radically different prices, throwing the market into disarray and thereby earning windfall profits, the punishment was forty strokes of the light stick.¹⁰⁵ These provisions may well have been unenforceable, but they followed a legal tradition that traced its origins to the T'ang code.¹⁰⁶ Because of the importance of brokers in

102 Huang, *Ming tai li li hui pien*, p. 493. 103 TML, article 168.

104 TMLHP, pp. 625–26, suggests that these provisions date from Yüan times, but there were earlier precedents.

105 TML, article 173. 106 T'ang li shu i, articles 421 and 423.

Ming times, this portion of the code attempted to curb the possibility for abuse by collusion between brokers and sellers.

LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONALISM

Judicial matters in traditional China were not the exclusive preserve of an independent judiciary, for judicial functions were exercised at all levels of the civil and military administration. During the T'ang and Sung periods, special examinations were held to recruit individuals with legal expertise. However, the specialization of legal learning did not continue in later eras. This is not to say that later administrators were ignorant of the law, for, in fact, they were expected to know the law in order to perform the judicial duties of their administrative roles. Yet, nothing comparable to the T'ang legal experts ever developed in later eras, with the important exception of the unofficial legal secretaries (*mu-yu*) who served local magistrates and other officials in Ch'ing times. Owing to the complexities of judicial administration, many Ch'ing officials formed groups of loyal retainers who advised them on technical matters of government and who often acted on an official's behalf in such matters. Judicial matters naturally received much attention.¹⁰⁷ In Ming times, however, this trend had not yet evolved into a distinct social phenomenon, and it is safe to say that legal professionalism was relatively undeveloped.

Nevertheless, a corpus of legal literature emerged during Ming times. These writings took the form of commentaries on the code and handbooks for magistrates that outlined legal doctrines and procedures. The commentaries and handbooks which are extant (see Appendix B) contain impressive attempts to define carefully the precise meaning of the statutes, their applications, and the proper use of litigation. Many of these works incorporated hypothetical cases to demonstrate practical applications of the statutes.

From time to time, Ming officials memorialized the throne to suggest the enforcement of examinations in law required in principle by the code. In 1532 the official, Ying Chia (1494–1554), an author of a commentary on the code and something of an expert on the law, made such a suggestion. In his opinion, judgments written by his contemporaries were too literary, and contained little evidence of a mastery of substantive legal issues. He bemoaned this state of affairs and urged the emperor to require annual examinations in the code and the sub-statutes for all officials. Those who failed once, he said, should be fined one month's salary; those who failed twice should receive

107 See Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *Local government in China under the Ch'ing* (Cambridge, 1962).

forty blows of the light stick and demerits; and those who failed three times should be demoted.¹⁰⁸ Similar views were expressed by Liu Yü (cs. 1496), who became vice-minister of Justice.¹⁰⁹ He sharply criticized the entire judicial apparatus, from the Ministry of Justice and the Grand Court of Revision down. He also attacked the disposition of specific major cases then being heard by the highest courts, charging that the judges had very little understanding of “the intent of the code” (*lüi*). To remedy this, he recommended that officials assigned to the Grand Court of Revision be required to undertake six months of study of the code and sub-statutes. If they then passed an examination, they could be certified as competent to handle penal matters. Those currently in office with insufficient knowledge were to be placed on probation while they acquired it. If they failed the examination at the end of the probation period, they were to be transferred to other offices. Ma Wen-sheng (1426–1510)¹¹⁰ a favorite of the Hsiao-tsung emperor, also strongly criticized judicial personnel, attacking their reasoning in a number of representative trials. Like Ying Chia, he recommended that the code’s provision requiring all officials to master the code be enforced.¹¹¹

Judging from these criticisms, it would seem that the first emperor’s wish that all officials be experts in the law had come to nought by the late fifteenth century. These criticisms also suggest that the legal system established in the fourteenth century had become seriously outmoded or even defective by the late fifteenth century, and that officials were understandably hard put to apply the existing code. The promulgation of the *Itemized precedents for trying penal matters* in 1500 represents the capable and concerned Hung-chih emperor’s attempt to deal with this problem, and it came about in response to criticism such as that outlined above. Furthermore, the growing number of commentaries and handbooks to the code that appeared in the sixteenth century indicate that something was indeed being done about the outmoded nature of the first emperor’s legal system. In the censorial system though, there is evidence that the importance of legal expertise was not overlooked,¹¹² so the true picture may not have been as bleak as the critics’ memorials imply.

108 *T'iao li pei k'ao* (Chia-ching pd. ed., Hishi copy in Gest Library), *Hsing pu*, 2.18a.

109 Memorials on the “intent of the code” and “penal trials” appear in Wang Ch'i, ed., *Hsüwen hsien t'ung k'ao* (1586; rpt. Tai-pei, 1979), 168, pp. 10b–12b, 15b–20b.

110 Biography in *MS*, 182.

111 Memorial in Wang Ch'i, *Hsüwen hsien t'ung k'ao*, 168, pp. 12b–15b.

112 Chü Huan-wu, “Ming tai hsün-an yü-shih” (Diss., National Cheng-chih University, Tai-pei, 1970), chapter 2, pp. 25–27.

Legal handbooks and commentaries

Legal handbooks were addressed to magistrates, and were intended to enlighten them about the nature and forms of the law and to guide in its application. An excellent example of these handbooks is Su Mao-hsiang's *Lin min pao ching* (*precious mirror for governing the people*).¹¹³ In the *Precious mirror* the entire code is reprinted with interlinear commentary. Each article of the code is followed by various materials pertaining to the issues addressed by that article. These materials were drawn from the commentaries to the code; from the *Ta Ming hui tien* (*Institutes of the great Ming*);¹¹⁴ from other materials related to the headings *shen* (hearings), *ts'an* (review), *tuan* (decision), *i* (interpretation), *p'an* (judgment), *shih* (instruction); and from sub-statutes. Each page is divided into an upper and a lower section, with the lower section, roughly one third of the page, containing the text of the code. The upper section contains the materials listed, spaced to correlate more or less with what appears in the lower section. In the *Precious mirror for governing the people*, the materials used in the upper section consist largely of hypothetical cases bearing on the legal texts that appear on the lower section of the page. Sub-statutes bearing on the censorial functions appear toward the end of the book. At the very end, the following texts are appended:

Hsing p'ung fu (*Rhymeprose on the Sung Dynasty Penal Code*), by Fu Lin (Sung period).

Hsi yüan lu (*The Washing Away of Wrongs*), by Sung Tz'u, a forensic text dating from 1242 in Sung times.¹¹⁵

Wu yüan lu (*The Elimination of Wrongs*), a Yüan period forensic text.

P'ing yüan lu (*The Rectification of Wrongs*), probably a Ming period forensic text. A table of the current prices of goods, set by imperial command (used for calculating the severity of a crime involving illicit goods).

This format is common among the Ming handbooks, even to the details of the titles of works appended.

The handbooks contain much useful, detailed information about preparing judgments, interpreting and applying the statutes, and similar matters. Some of them also contain rhymed songs designed to help magistrates

113 Su Mao-hsiang earned the cs. in 1592. This work is also known by a longer title, *Ta Ming lü li lin min pao ching*, and was published in 1632.

114 *Ta Ming hui tien*, 1511, rev. ed. 1587.

115 See Herbert Allen Giles, tr., "The 'Hsi Yüan Lu' or Instructions to Coroners," *China Review*, 3 (1874-75), pp. 30-38, 92-99, 159-72; rpt. as "Section of the history of medicine," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 17 (London, 1924) pp. 59-107. For a more up-to-date study see Brian E. McKnight, trans., *The washing away of wrongs: forensic medicine in thirteenth century China. Science, medicine and technology in East Asia*, Vol. 1. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1981).

remember the important themes and doctrines in the various sections of the code. Other handbooks contain such writings as the *Wei cheng kuei mo* (*Standards for those who govern*) and *Fa chia tsung lun* (*General teachings for the jurist*). The latter text appears at the end of the *San t'ai Ming lü chao p'an cheng tsung* (*Standard forms of confessions and judgments for the Ming Code*), just before the reprint of the *The Washing Away of Wrongs*. The main theme of this text is that there are many instances in which a case must be appealed, and it attempts to outline these instances using hypothetical cases.

General teachings for the jurist is interesting for its presentation of the meaning and value of law much in the tradition established by the ancient philosopher Hsün Tzu:

In antiquity, law . . . controlled human affairs and maintained a balance. Hsiao Ho (d. 193 B.C.) set the code to quell the wrongdoers of the world. Confucius threw light on the Way to establish a model for the norms of ruler and minister. Thus, litigation is governed by laws and measures. This is because litigation arises, does it not, from the wrongfulness in men's hearts, struggles between the strong and the weak, and the imbalance in material desires. This is because, by nature, there cannot but be desires.¹¹⁶

General teachings goes on to note that people cannot exist in isolation from one another and leaves the reader to conclude that laws are needed to allow society to function.

This text notes that using the limited statutes in a code to govern the boundless things that can happen in the world presents a difficulty. It argues that the code and sub-statutes, and the founding emperor's *Grand Pronouncements*, provided tools for governing litigation, as it is litigation (*ts'u-sung*) that makes it possible for human beings to establish equitable solutions to problems (*t'ui shih-wu chih kung-p'ing*). It perceives litigation as a winnowing process which enables one to separate the rice from the chaff and also enables those who cannot defend themselves to recover their positions.

Speak for the dumb, help the blind walk, extend the will of the stupid, chastise the unruly, uproot the winter branches, supplement the needy, eliminate the excess, disgrace the immoral, punish the evil, pave roads, ford deep rivers, succor the weak and help the imperiled, praise the good and blame the evil, . . .¹¹⁷

The text continues with a discussion of the forms, rules, and argumentation of litigation, providing advice to the magistrate on how to distinguish truth from falsehood, cautioning him to uphold the purpose of the code in every instance. The text emphasizes comprehensibility in legal writing: what must be avoided is a difficult and obscure literary style. Litigation complaints

¹¹⁶ Shu Hua, *San t'ai Ming lü chao p'an cheng tsung* (Hishi copy, Tokyo, n.d.), 12, pp. 12-2b.

¹¹⁷ Shu Hua, *San t'ai Ming lü chao p'an cheng tsung* (Hishi copy, Tokyo, n.d.), 12, pp. 12-2b.

must be written clearly and follow a tripartite structure. In part one, the cause of the dispute and the details and history of the matter were to be clearly set forth. In part two, the illegal act was to be precisely described. This part might discuss a beating, an argument, a forceful seizure, or defrauding someone of his money. In this part the details concerning evidence and the illicit goods had to be provided. Part three was to contain the judge's analysis of the affair: "The language should be rigorous and should clearly bring out the basic [legal] principles bearing on the foregoing items."¹¹⁸

General teachings for the jurist provides concise models of various types of complaints. In the section on household and corvée services, the text makes its main point: that, when faced with difficulty, one ought to "Bring a complaint!" (*shang kao*). The models that are provided are hypothetical cases which include such items as a dispute over the inheritance of property, a suit against a brother, and other similar matters. The cases are arranged by such categories as: marriage, inheritance, bandits and robbers, taking life, affrays, sexual crimes, and special appeals. The case of a man whose adopted son ran off with all his money is one example of this material. The text proclaims:

You are old and your son is dead. The wind on the candle is not constant, and it is about to go out. A certain person relied on match-maker so-and-so to invite so-and-so to care for you in your old age and did not take any money [in payment for this service]. Three years after coming into your household, when you have cared for him as if he were your son, how could you have known he would suddenly develop a mind to betray you, become unruly and obstinate, rob you of your money and grain and go off on his own? If you go along with him, he will go away; but if you admonish him, he will be your enemy.¹¹⁹

What should you do? "Bring a complaint!" is the advice.

Another example hypothesizes the story of a boy adopted as a man's heir and who, together with his adoptive father, built the family property:

Later, the father took a concubine who bore a son, your younger brother. The woman then wanted to gain complete control of the property, so she turned your father against you. One day, for no reason he beat you, pulled your hair, bit your elbow to the bone, knocked out your front teeth; the mother beat you with a club, wounding you all over. The mother was still dissatisfied, so she accused you before the authorities. Bring a complaint!¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Shu Hua, *San t'ai Ming lü*, 12, p. 2b.

¹¹⁹ Shu Hua, *San t'ai Ming lü chao p'an cheng tsung* (Hishi copy, Tokyo, n.d.), 12, pp. 43a-b.

¹²⁰ Shu Hua, *San t'ai Ming lü*, 12, pp. 43a-b.

The case of Hsü Chi and his younger sister

Capital cases received the most careful attention in Ming law, for they had to be reheard at higher levels. Moreover, a person found guilty of a capital crime could request a rehearing through the censorial authorities. Such rehearings were often held at the local level under instructions from higher judicial officials. Sometimes a group of magistrates would be required to hear a case together (*hui-shen*); magistrates could often find themselves asked to rehear cases that originally had arisen outside their jurisdiction but that were close enough to allow them to conduct efficient inquiries.

One enlightening case was heard by the sixteenth-century official Hai Jui (1514–87) when he was magistrate of Ch'un-an county in Yen-chou prefecture, Chekiang.¹²¹ Hai Jui was appointed magistrate there in 1558 and remained in that place until 1563 when he was assigned to another county. He heard the case in question in 1561.¹²² It had originated in T'ung-lu county, also in Yen-chou prefecture. By the time Hai heard the case, it already had been tried and reheard seven times, including a joint hearing by three magistrates. Hai finally resolved the case by applying a common sense analysis and by rigorous attention to the facts. In the process he succeeded in righting a great injustice.

The cast of characters in the case were a person named Hsü Chi, his mother, his younger sister, his sister's husband Tai, and a local government clerk named P'an. As Hai Jui eventually determined the facts of the case, Hsü Chi's mother had loaned three taels of silver to Tai, but even though Hsü Chi made several attempts on her behalf to collect the payments from Tai, he had no success. One day the clerk P'an spent the night at Tai's house. That same evening Tai had run into his brother-in-law Hsü Chi, so he invited Hsü to join him and P'an at his home for some wine. Hsü got to talking about the overdue loan, and a fight ensued. Hsü beat Tai over the head with a stone and pushed him into a pond, where Tai died. Hsü Chi then weighted Tai's body with heavy stones and submerged it in the pond.

The case was reported to the Chekiang Provincial Surveillance Office, which ordered the Hang-chou prefect to assign the case to the magistrate of T'ung-lu county for trial. The T'ung-lu magistrate tried Hsü Chi, his sister, and P'an for the crime, and found them all guilty. In his provisional sentence, he sentenced the sister, Hsü, to death by slicing by reference to the statute on "premeditated killing of one's husband because of adultery."¹²³ (The stat-

121 Biography in *MS*, 226. See also Ray Huang, 1587, pp. 130–55.

122 See Hai Jui, *Hai Jui chi* (Pei-ching, 1962), *shang* 3, pp. 175–76; Ray Huang, 1587, pp. 150–51.

123 See Hai Jui, *Hai Jui chi*, *shang* 3, pp. 175–76; Ray Huang, 1587, pp. 150–51.

utory punishment for this crime was death by slicing.) P'an was ordered to be decapitated for his role in the murder, and Hsü Chi was sentenced to strangulation for his role as "an accomplice who contributed to the crime." The magistrate's rationale for the sentence was that Hsü's sister had allegedly committed adultery with the clerk P'an and had led a conspiracy with P'an and her brother Hsü Chi to murder her husband Tai. Although Hsü Chi had administered the fatal blow, the woman had played a role as principal conspirator. This theory of the killing was supported by confessions from the clerk, P'an.

Following the original trial, the case received a mandatory rehearing at the prefectural level. At that stage, the circumstances of the alleged adultery were not reported, and hence, the judge reduced the provisional sentence of the sister to strangulation in accordance with the statute on "killing in the course of an affray."¹²⁴ The case then went through normal channels for higher review. After a hearing by the regional inspector, it went to the Censorate and then to the Grand Court of Revision. The Grand Court found reason to send it back for a joint rehearing by three magistrates; in this case, the magistrates of T'ung-lu, Chien-te, and Sui-an, counties in Yen-chou prefecture. They supported the original provisional sentence pronounced by the T'ung-lu magistrate, perhaps in support of their fellow judge, and reinstated the sentences of death by slicing for sister Hsü, decapitation for P'an, and strangulation for Hsü Chi.

The case was yet again sent up through regular channels for review. In 1561 it was heard in Hang-chou by another regional inspector. There, Hsü Chi's sister lodged a personal emotional appeal, asking the judge to ascertain why she, a woman who had given birth to two sons and a daughter by her husband Tai, should have committed adultery with the clerk P'an and conspired to kill her husband. As a result of this appeal, the inspector sent the case back down to the General Administration Circuit, thence to the prefect, and finally to the magistrate of Ch'un-an, for study and clarification. This magistrate was none other than Hai Jui.

Hai Jui found out that Tai's death had been caused by fierce blows from Hsü Chi which had been administered in a fight over the money which Hsü's mother had loaned to Tai. "It had nothing to do with P'an," Hai concluded. As he put it, "the original provisional sentence given [to Hsü Chi's sister and P'an] for jointly carrying out a premeditated killing simply cannot be supported. This is an evil of the greatest magnitude, a matter of the utmost impossibility, a thing of sheer unspeakability." Thus, he subjected the case to common sense analysis, concluding that the woman Hsü had had no

124 *TML*, article 313.

motive to murder her husband. Her alleged lover had little to offer her, he suggested, because he was no better off than her husband. Furthermore, she had children by her husband. As Hai put it:

One can throw away a husband, [but the relation between] mother and child is endowed by heaven, and considering human relations, it stands to reason that if she was attached to her children, she was also attached to her husband. Yet it is claimed [by the T'ung-lu magistrate] that the woman Hsü planned to become the concubine [of P'an]!¹²⁵

Hai Jui had taken pains to gather some facts. First P'an had a principal wife. Therefore, if the woman Hsü were going to marry P'an, she would have had to do so as his concubine. Why would she have wanted to lower her status in this way? Secondly, P'an was no richer than her husband, so there was no plausible economic motive for her to substitute P'an for her husband. Failing to find a plausible motive for the sister's alleged crime, Hai Jui wrote "the only conclusion is that [Tai] was struck and killed in an angry argument over the loan."

Thirdly, and perhaps most critical to his handling of the case, Hai Jui determined to his satisfaction that the false confessions of P'an and the servant, which had implicated the woman, had been elicited by torture.

Hai Jui's position was apparently accepted by the higher officials. The new sentence would then have freed P'an and the woman Hsü, and set the penalty for her brother at strangulation.

CONCLUSION

The study of Ming law is handicapped by the lack of case records, for we have no compilations similar to the Ch'ing period's *Hsing-an hui-lan* or *Conspectus of criminal cases*.¹²⁶ As a result, it is very difficult to know exactly how the law was applied, and to what extent officials really knew the law. We have records of debates by scholars over the relative inadequacy of officials' knowledge of the laws, but these were highly politicized discussions. If the case of Hsü Chi and his sister is any indication, serious cases could be reviewed numerous times. The case is celebrated – and known to us today – because Hai Jui later became famous and because his writings about the case have been preserved. But one can presume that many other cases, similarly reviewed, also took place. One may perhaps conclude from this single instance that the system, on occasion, did devote a considerable amount of time and energy in

¹²⁵ Hai Jui, *Hai Jui chi*, *shang* 3, pp. 176.

¹²⁶ See Bodde and Morris, *Law in imperial China*. *Hsing-an hui-lan* was compiled in 1834.

reviewing cases involving those who might be called “the little people” for want of a better term. It may be, however, that only capital crimes received such careful attention from the authorities and that the vast majority of minor crimes and economic disputes were left to the local authorities and clan institutions to resolve.¹²⁷

In the sixteenth century the throne sought to curb the excesses of the nobility through such promulgations as the *Itemized precedents for trying penal matters*. Again, it is unlikely that a barrage of official promulgations could have had much effect on the nobility, given the limited resources of the throne to enforce its edict. But the effort was made, apparently quite earnestly, to rein in the princes and nobles, a group whose numbers had grown substantially since the founder’s day.

The throne also sought, through the *Itemized precedents for trying penal matters* in its various editions, to coordinate the many ad hoc sub-statutes that had been issued over a period of time in response to specific situations that had not been precisely anticipated in the unchanging code. In this way, the Ming enjoyed the benefit of having an unchanging bed rock upon which to rest its legal order while maintaining flexibility through issuing sub-statutes from time to time in order to accommodate changes in society.

Perhaps because the system per se did not encourage the development of legal specialists, a body of almost-vernacular literature emerged which aimed at assisting officials to know the law.

The sentencing of criminals was a complex weighing act. The judge was supposed to apply the code, but the code did not always perfectly address each case at hand. The judge, therefore, was expected to use the code as a reference and to vary sentences appropriately by analogy to articles in the code. As a safeguard against arbitrary and capricious sentencing, the law required judges, in cases of sentencing by analogy, to draft provisional sentences which had to be submitted to the throne for endorsement. This could have created a heavy burden on the throne, because, presumably, most cases submitted varied one way or another from cases for which the code provided. As a consequence, the checks and balances implied in the rules on sentencing were probably negated by the impracticality of submitting many cases to the throne for review.

These issues remained concerns throughout the succeeding Ch’ing period, as the Ch’ing usually continued to follow the legal theories and practices of the Ming.

127 This is Ray Huang’s view. See 1587, pp. 148–50.

APPENDIX A

MING COMMENTARIES ON THE CODE
AND HANDBOOKS ON JURISPRUDENCE

Che yü hsin yü 折獄新語 (New talks on deciding cases), by Li Ch'ing 李清 (1591–1673) 10 ch.

Fa chia t'i yao 法家體要 (Essentials for the jurist), no author, 1565.

Hsiang hsing yao lan 祥刑要覽 (The study of the law), by Wu Na 吳訥 (1371–1457), 1486.

Hsing shu chü hui 刑書據會 (Essentials of the penal code), by P'eng Ying-pi 彭應弼.

I chih pien 益智編 (For the better of learning), by Sun Neng-ch'uan 孫能傳, 1614, section on criminal cases 刑獄類 ch. 24–27.

Lü chieh pien i 律解辯疑 (Distinguishing doubtful matters to explain the code), by Ho Kuang 何廣, preface dated 1386.

Lü t'iao pien lan chih yin 律條便覽直引 (Handy reference to the statutes), by a Mr. Ch'en 陳氏 mid-Ming, not later than 1566.

Lü t'iao shu i fu Lü t'iao tsui ming t'u 律條疏義附律條罪名圖 (Commentary on the statutes, with appendix of diagrams of the punishments in the statutes), by Chang K'ai 張楷, 1471.

San t'ai Ming lü chao p'an cheng tsung 三臺明律招判正宗 (Standard forms of confessions and judgements for the Ming code), by Yü Yüan 余員.

Ta Ming hsing shu chin chien 大明刑書金鑑 (Golden Mirror of the Great Ming legal code), no author, ms. in Pei-ching Library.

Ta Ming lü chi chieh 大明律集解 (Great Ming code and commentary), ed. by Wang Nan 王楠, 1551–52. (W. Franke, 6.3.3 (2).)

Ta Ming lü chi chieh 大明律集解 (Great Ming code and commentary), ed. by Hu Ch'ung 胡瓊. (W. Franke, 6.3.3 (4).)

Ta Ming lü chi chieh fu li 大明律集解附例 (Commentary to the Great Ming code, with appended sub-statutes), by Kao Chü 高舉 (1553–1624). (W. Franke, 6.3.3 (10).)

Ta Ming lü chieh fu li 大明律解附例 (Commentary to the Great Ming code, with appended sub-statutes), by Cheng Ju-pi 鄭汝璧 (1546–1607). (W. Franke, 6.3.3. (6).)

Ta Ming lü li fu chieh 大明律例附解 (The Great Ming code with appended commentary), ed. Mr. Tu 杜氏. (W. Franke 6.3.3 (3).)

Ta Ming lü li chu shih chao ni che yü chih nan 大明律例註釋招擬折獄指南 (Commentary to the Great Ming code, guide to confessions, provisional sentences, and solving cases), ed. unknown. (W. Franke 6.3.3 (12).)

Ta Ming lü fu li 大明律附例 (Great Ming code plus sub-statutes), by Shu Hua 舒化. (W. Franke 6.3.3 (5).)

Ta Ming lü fu li chien shih 大明律附例箋釋 (Commentary on the Great Ming code with sub-statutes), by Wang Ch'iao 王樵 (1521–99) and his son Wang K'en-t'ang 王肯堂 (c. 1589), 1612. (W. Franke, 6.3.3 (11).)

Ta Ming lü fu li chu chieh 大明律附例註解 (Commentary on the Great Ming code with sub-statutes), by Yao Ssu-jen 姚思仁 (c. 1583), ca 1600. (W. Franke 6.3.3 (8).)

Ta Ming lü li chih chün ch'i shu 大明律例致君奇術 (Marvellous methods for the ruler, the Great Ming code), by Chu Ching-hsün 朱敬循. Hishi copy at Princeton University, Gest Library.

Ta Ming lü li chü hui hsi chu 大明律例據會細註 (Detailed commentary to key matters in the great Ming code). Hishi copy of Edo period Japanese edition at Princeton University, Gest Library.

Ta Ming lü li [chu shih] hsiang hsing ping chien 大明律例註釋祥刑冰鑑 (Lucid commentary on the Great Ming code and sub-statutes), by Tung Yü 董裕 (d.1606), 1599. (W. Franke 6.3.3 (7).)

Ta Ming lü li lin min pao ching 大明律例臨民寶鏡 (Precious mirror for governing the people: the Great Ming code and sub-statutes), by Su Mao-hsiang 蘇茂相 (c. 1592), 1632.

Ta Ming lü li t'ien shih p'ang chu 大明律例添釋旁註 (Explanations and inter-linear notes on the Great Ming code and sub-statutes), by Hsü Ch'ang-tso 徐昌祚 (Wan-li period). (W. Franke 6.3.3 (9).)

Ta Ming lü [li] shih i 大明律例釋義 (Commentary to the Great Ming code), by Ying Chia 應欉 (1494–1554).

Ta Ming lü shu fu li (Commentary to the Great Ming code, with appended sub-statutes), compiled by order of emperor T'ai-tsu 明太祖敕撰, but dated 1568.

Ta Ming lung t'ou pien tu p'ang hsiün lü fa ch'üan shu 大明龍頭便讀傍訓律法全書 (Complete encyclopedia of the law, the Great Ming code, convenient handbook for enlightened judges), by Kung Chü 貢舉. Hishi copy in Princeton University, Gest Library.

Tu lü p'ei hsi 讀律佩觿 (Bodkin (for unpicking knots) to be worn on the girdle when reading the code), by Wang Ming-te 王明德, 1674.

Tu lü so yen 讀律瑣言 (Miscellaneous notes on reading the code) by Lei Meng-lin 雷夢麟, 1563.

MING HANDBOOKS FOR LOCAL MAGISTRATES

Chiang T'ing-pi 蔣廷璧 (c. 1522). *Chiang kung cheng hsiün* 蔣公政訓 (Master Chiang's teachings on government). This work appears in the 1584, 1629, and Ch'ung-chen period editions of *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. The full title is sometimes given as *Kuo-tzu hsien-sheng P'u-shan Chiang kung cheng hsiün* 國子先生璞山蔣公政訓 (National Academy Instructor Master Chiang P'u-shan's teachings on government) and it is also known under the title *Chiang P'u-shan cheng hsiün* 蔣璞山政訓 (Master Chiang P'u-shan's teachings on government). The separate copy in Peking Library was most likely printed from the same blocks as the copy in the 1584 edition of the *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. The separate copy in the Naikaku Bunko was printed from the same blocks as the copy in the 1629 edition of the *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*, but later as the cracks in the blocks have widened and there are additional cracks. Another copy, which I have not been able to examine, is in the edition of *Ke chih ts'ung shu* 格致叢書 in Chung-shan University Library. A collated edition is appended to Thomas G. Nimick, "The County, the magistrate, and the Yamen in Late Ming China." Diss., Princeton University, 1993, pp. 229–51. This was originally the recommendations that, in 1539, he sent to his son, who was a newly appointed county magistrate in Honan. It reflects his observation of local government when he was Director of Studies in Ch'ing-shen County in Szechuan in the 1530s. In 1559 his son and grandsons edited the entire text and divided the recommendations into individual items. This handbook focuses on specific procedures for local administration.

Chih yao lu 治要錄 (Record of essentials of governance). P'an Yu-lung 潘游龍, ed. MS with a 1637 preface held in Hangchow University Library. In the *fan-li* of his *K'ang chi p'u* P'an claimed that this was his work, but the content is almost identical with Wu Tsun's *Ch'u shih lu*. P'an never served in any official capacity, but he was involved in editing projects for works in several different genres. It appears that P'an copied the earlier work.

Chu Feng-chi 朱逢吉 (d. 1403). *Mu min hsin chien* 牧民心鑑 (Mirror of the heart for shepherding the people). Undated block print edition. Rpt. in *Ts'ung cheng tien fan chi* 從政典範集 (Collection of models for service in government). Taipei: Lao Ku Ch'u-pan-she, 1979. Several Japanese editions of this work are held in the Naikaku Bunko. For a modern edition, see *Bokumin shinkan* 牧民心鑑. Hayashi Hideichi 林秀一, tr. and annot. Tokyo: Meitoku

Shuppansha, 1973. Translation and full typeset copy of the original text. This handbook was first printed in 1404. It reflects Chu's experience as the magistrate of Ning-chin County in Hopei at the end of the Hung-wu period (c. 1390). This work focuses on general guidance for local governance.

Ch'u shih yao lan 初仕要覽 (Review of essentials for beginning as an official). This work appears in the 1629 and Ch'ung-chen period editions of *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. It has one section on general guidance for local governance and one section of specific procedures for local administration.

Chü kuan pi-yao wei cheng pien lan 居官必要為政便覽 (Review of essentials for governing for those serving as officials). This work appears in the 1629 and Ch'ung-chen period editions of *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. Some of the material in this handbook has been drawn from Hsü T'ang's *Chü kuan ke yen* and the two handbooks in *Hsin kuan kwei-fan*. The material has been edited and supplemented. This handbook focuses on specific procedures in local administration.

He Wen-yüan 何文淵 (1385–1457, *ca.* 1418). *Mu min pei yung* 牧民備用 (Preparations for shepherding the people). No independent copies of this work are known to exist. This may be the handbook that was reprinted as part of the *Hsin kuan kwei fan*. This was written in 1435 or 1436 and reflects his investigation of local administration while he was a prefect in Wen-chou in Chekiang. He had also served as a censor in Hu-Kuang and Shantung. The preface to the original edition is preserved in his *Tung yuan i kao* 東園遺稿. Block print with 1559 preface in Naikaku Bunko. 2/11a–12a.

Hsin kuan kwei-fan 新官軌範 (Guidelines for new officials). This work appears in the 1584, 1629, and Ch'ung-chen period editions of *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. The separate copy in the Naikaku Bunko was most likely printed from the same blocks as the copy in the 1584 edition of the *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. The separate copy in the Library of Congress, though listed as a Chia-ching period work, was printed from the same blocks as the copy in the 1629 edition of the *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. Another copy, which I have not been able to examine, is in the version of *Ke chih ts'ung shu* 格致叢書 in Chung-shan University Library. A collated edition is appended to Thomas G. Nimick, "The County, the magistrate, and the Yamen in Late Ming China." Diss., Princeton University, 1993, pp. 252–78. This work is a collation of two earlier handbooks. The first text is entitled "T'i-li wei-cheng shih-ch'ing 體立為政事情." The material in this text was written by a person who had experience as county magistrate because in some of the items he uses first

person pronouns to comment on what he did as a magistrate. The second text, "Mu-min pei yung 牧民備用," may be a copy of the earlier handbook by He Wen-yüan. Both handbooks focus on specific procedures for local administration.

Hsü T'ang 許堂 (c. 1495). *Chü kuan ke yen* 居官格言 (Proverbs for those serving as officials). This work appears in the 1584, 1629, and Ch'ung-ch'en period editions of *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. Another copy, which I have not been able to examine, is in the version of *Ke chih ts'ung shu* 格致叢書 in Chung-shan University Library. Two Japanese manuscript copies are in Naikaku Bunko; a photographic reprint of the 1816 manuscript is held in Gest Oriental Library. A collated edition of the section on specific procedures is appended to Thomas G. Nimick, "The County, the magistrate, and the Yamen in Late Ming China." Diss., Princeton University, 1993, pp. 223–28. This handbook reflects his experience as a magistrate between 1508 and 1511 in Chiang County in Shansi and An-hua County in Shensi. He wrote it first for students in the Confucian school in Ch'ien Subprefecture in Shensi. He later revised it for students in the National Academy, where he served from 1513–19. The preface is dated 1513, but a 1519 date appears in the text. This handbook has one section on general guidance for local governance and one section of specific procedures for local administration.

Hsüeh Hsüan 薛瑄 (1389–1464, c. 1421). *Ts'ung cheng ming yen* 從政名言 (Famous sayings about government service). The full title is sometimes given as *Hsüeh Wen-ch'ing Ts'ung cheng ming yen* 薛文清從政名言 (Hsüeh Wen-ch'ing's famous sayings about government service). 1535 preface. Rpt. in *Ts'ung cheng tien fan chi* 從政典範集 (Collection of models for service in government). Taipei: Lao Ku Ch'u-pan-she, 1979. This is not original material. In 1535 Hu Tsuan-tsung 胡纘宗 (1480–1560, c. 1508) selected material about governance from the author's *Tu shu lu* 讀書錄 (Record of things read) and published them. A further abridgement was published under the title *Ts'ung cheng lu* 從政錄 (Record of government service) in *Pao yen t'ang pi chi* 寶顏堂秘笈. Shanghai: Wen-ming shu chü, 1922. This work focuses on the general principles of government.

K'ang chi p'u 康濟譜 (A collection of examples for bringing health and prosperity). P'an Yu-lung 潘游龍, ed. Block print with 1641 preface held in Gest Oriental Library. This is a large compilation of historical biographies of exemplary officials, famous statements on aspects of local government, summaries of Ming Dynasty official pronouncements on local

government, and some general commentary. P'an himself never served as an official.

Kao P'an-lung 高攀龍 (1562–1626, *ca.* 1589), *Tse ch'eng chou hsien yüeh* 則成州縣約 (Prescriptions for subprefectural and county magistrates). In *Ts'ung cheng I kuei* 從政遺規 (Inherited guidelines for government service), *ch.* B. In *Wu chung i kuei* 五種遺規 (Five types of inherited guidelines). Ch'en Hung-mou 陳弘謀 (1696–1771), ed. 1742 edition. Rpt. in *Ssu-pu pei yao*. Taipei: T'ai-wan Chung-hua Shu-ch'ü, 1965. This work is abridged from a memorial, entitled "Shen yen hsien yüeh tse ch'eng chou hsien shu 申嚴憲約責成州縣疏 (A memorial with strict prescriptions for subprefectural and county magistrates)," that Kao P'an-lung wrote but never submitted. The original can be found in his *Kao tzu i shu* 高子遺書 (Inherited writings of Master Kao). 1632 edition. Library of Congress microfilm of copy now in National Central Library, 7:35b. This was not intended to be guidance from a fellow official, but rather was written as guidelines to be promulgated by the central government through provincial officials. It focuses on specific procedures in local administration.

Kuan ch'ang cheng yao 官常政要 (Essentials of government from the standards of officialdom). Nanking: Chin-ling Shu Fang, 1584. This collection has 11 works in 21 *ch.* and includes a number of handbooks. No complete copy is known to exist. One partial copy is in Peking Library and one partial copy, which I have not been able to examine, is privately held. Second edition. Nanking: Chin-ling Shu Fang, 1629. This collection has 22 works in 41 *ch.* It includes all of the works from 1584 edition. A complete copy is in Peking University Library and a partial copy is in the Chinese Academy of Sciences Library. Third edition under the title, *Ch'ung-k'e ho-ping Kuan ch'ang cheng yao ch'üan-shu* 重刻合併官常政要全書 (Reprint and collation of Important matters of government for officialdom). Nanking: Chin-ling Shu Fang, Ch'ung-chen period. This collection has 29 works in 50 *ch.* It includes all of the works in 1584 and 1629 editions. There are complete copies in the Chekiang Provincial Library and the Shantung Provincial Library. This is collectanea specifically for local magistrates. It reprints a number of handbooks and other materials related to local administration.

Lü K'un 呂坤 (1536–1618, *ca.* 1574). *Shih cheng lu* 實政錄 (Record of practical government). 1598 edition in Peking Library. Wan-li period edition under the title *Hsin-k'e Lü Shu-chien hsien-sheng Chü kuan pi-yao* (Reprint of Master Lü Shu-chien's Essentials for governing for those serving as officials) in

Sonkeikaku Bunko. 1797 edition, rpt. Taipei: Wen Shih Che Ch'u-pan-she, 1971. This is a collation of his earlier handbooks written as prescriptions from a superior local official. It focuses on both general guidelines for local administration and specific procedures.

Mu chien 牧鑑 (Mirror for shepherding). Yang Yü 楊昱, ed. 1555 Block print in Peking Library. Ch'ing period block print in *Te yüeh i ts'ung-shu* 得月簪叢書; rpt. in *Pai pu ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng* 百部叢書集成. Taipei: I-wen Yin-shu Kuan, 1967. This work focuses on the general principles of government by providing quotations from the writings of important officials and biographical anecdotes about successful officials in Chinese history.

Mu chin 牧津 (Essential Shepherd). Ch'i Ch'eng-han 祁承燦 (1565–1628, or 1604), ed. 1624 block print; Library of Congress microfilm of a copy in National Central Library. This illustrates general principles of government through a large collection of biographies of officials throughout Chinese history.

Mu min cheng yao 牧民政要 (Essentials of government for shepherding the people). This work appears in the 1629 and Ch'ung-chen period editions of *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. Internal evidence shows that it is from the Ch'ung-chen period. It focuses on warnings about the use of the cane and torture, and recommends specific procedures for tax collection.

Shih t'u hsüan ching 仕途懸鏡 (Proclaimed mirror for those on the road to officialdom). Wang Shih-mao 王世茂, ed. n.p., 1626 preface. This work also carries the fuller title *hsin-k'e ching-tsuan hsiang-chu Shih t'u hsüan ching* 新刻精纂詳註仕途懸鏡 (Reprinted carefully compiled Proclaimed mirror for those on the road to officialdom, with detailed commentary). Copies are held by the Library of Congress and Peking Library. This is a collectanea of materials for new magistrates. Material from handbooks is gathered together in the section entitled *Shih shih shih-mo* 筮士始末 (Considerations for preparing to be an official). All of this section is drawn from either *Ch'u shih lu* or *Chü kuan pi-yao wei cheng pien lan*. The material focuses on specific procedures for local administration.

Wang Ta 王達 (1343–1407). *Pi ch'ou* 筆疇 (Writings on former officials). Wan-li period edition; rpt. in *Pao yen t'ang pi chi* 寶顏堂秘笈. Shanghai: Wen-ming shu chü, 1922. This was probably written when he was an assistant instructor at the National Academy. This work focuses on the general principles of government.

Wang T'ien-hsi 汪天錫. *Kuan chen chi-yao* 官箴集要 (Essential extracts from guidance for officials). 1535 edition in Peking University Library and 1619 edition in the Peking Palace Museum Library. I have not been able to compare this text with the other handbooks, but there is material that is drawn from other sources in both the Yuan and the Ming. It contains a combination of general principles and recommendations on specific procedures for local administration.

Wei cheng chun tse 為政準則 (Criteria for governance). This handbook is mentioned by Hu Hsi-yen as being in common use in 1513.¹ It is also listed in the *Ming shih i-wen chih*.² As noted in the *Ming shih i-wen chih*, this title appears as *Chiu huang huo min wei cheng chun tse* 救荒活民為政準則 in *Lu chu t'ang shu mu* 萊竹堂書目.³ No extant copy of this work is known to exist.

Wu Tsun 吳遵 (c. 1547). *Ch'u shih lu* 初仕錄 (Record of beginning as an official). Nanking: Kuo-tzu chien, Chia-ching period. This edition is in Peking Library. This work also appears in the 1584, 1629, and Ch'ung-chen period editions of *Kuan ch'ang cheng yao*. Another copy, which I have not been able to examine, is in the edition of *Ke chih ts'ung shu* 格致叢書 in Shantung Provincial Library and Shou-tu Library. This handbook reflects his experience as the magistrate of Ch'ang-lo County in Fukien in the late 1540s. It has one section on general guidance for local governance and one section on specific procedures for local administration.

Yü Tzu-ch'iang 余自強. *Chih p'u ch'üan-shu* 治譜全書 (Complete book of records of governance). 1637 edition in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Library. This is a compilation drawn from numerous previous handbooks. I have not been able to compare the texts. It focuses on both general principles and specific procedures.

Other Bibliographic Citations

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- Hsüeh Hsüan 薛瑄 (1389–1464, c. 1421). *Tu shu lu* 讀書錄. 1721 Japanese edition; reprint in *Chin-shih Han chi tsung-kan* 近世漢籍叢刊. Taipei: Chung-wen Ch'u-pan she, 1975.

1 See the preface to Hsü T'ang, *Chü kuan ke yen*, pp. 1b–2a.

2 *Ming shih i-wen chih*, *Ming shih i-wen chih pu pien*, *Ming shih i-wen chih fu pien*, Chang T'ing-yü, et al. eds. (Peking: Peking Shang-wu, 1959), p. 258.

3 Yeh Sheng 葉盛 (1420–74). *Lu chu t'ang shu mu* 萊竹堂書目, in *Yüeh ya t'ang ts'ung shu* 粵雅堂叢書, rpt. in *Pai-pu ts'ung shu chi ch'eng* (Taipei: I-wen Yin-shu-kuan, 1965), 5: 18b.

- Kao P'an-lung 高攀龍 (1562–1626, *ca.* 1589). *Kao tzu i shu* 高子遺書. 1632 block print. Library of Congress microfilm of copy now in National Central Library.
- Ming shih I-wen chih*, *Ming shih I-wen chih pu pien*, *Ming shih I-wen chih fu pien* 明史藝文志, 明史藝文志補編, 明史藝文志附編. Chang T'ing-yü 張廷玉, et al. eds. Peking: Peking Shang-wu, 1959.
- Yeh Sheng 葉盛 (1420–1474). *Lu chu t'ang shu mu* 菉竹堂書目. In *Yüeh ya t'ang ts'ung shu* 粵雅堂叢書. Reprint in *Pai-pu ts'ung shu chi ch'eng*. Taipei: I-wen Yin-shu-kuan, 1965.

CHAPTER 4

THE MING AND INNER ASIA

Ming China, having just endured a century of Mongol rule, sought to avert further occupations by a people or state from Inner Asia.¹ Court policy was, therefore, generally based on restricting relations with foreigners, particularly those from across the northern and northwestern borders. Fear of future invasions conditioned the Ming's attitudes and policies toward Central and Inner Asia. The court was determined to reinstate the Chinese world order so as to maintain control over the conduct of foreign relations.² Yet the economic benefits to be garnered from dealings with the peoples north of China could not be discounted. Merchants and some officials who profited from trade naturally attempted to support an increase in commerce.³ When court restrictions on commerce persisted, these merchants and officials even evaded the regulations and continued to trade with the peoples and tribes across the borders.

- 1 Citations to Asian sources have been kept to a minimum. The reader is referred to the following works by the author of this chapter for citations of East Asian and Middle Eastern sources: "Ming China's relations with Hami and Central Asia, 1404–1513: A reexamination of traditional Chinese foreign policy" (Diss., Columbia University, 1970); "The tea and horse trade with Inner Asia during the Ming," *Journal of Asian History*, 4, No. 2 (1970), pp. 31–39; "Esen's pride and Ming China's prejudice," *The Mongolia Society Bulletin* 9, No. 2 (Fall, 1970), pp. 31–39; "Ming China and Turfan, 1406–1517," *Central Asiatic Journal*, 16, No. 3 (1972), pp. 206–25; "Cheng Ho and Timur: Any relation?" *Oriens Extremus*, 20, No. 2 (December, 1973), pp. 129–36; Biographies in *A dictionary of Ming biography*, eds. L. C. Goodrich and C. Y. Fang (New York, 1976), pp. 1–2, 11–15, 416–20, 479–81, 683–86, 971–72, 1035–39, 1308–09; "Two Ming envoys to Inner Asia," *T'oung Pao*, 62, No. 1–3 (1976), pp. 1–34; "Muslim revolts in late Ming and early Ch'ing," In *From Ming to Ch'ing*, eds. John Wills and Jonathan Spence (New Haven, 1979), pp. 168–99; *The Jurchens in the Yüan and Ming* (Ithaca, 1982); "A translation of Ch'en Ch'eng's *Hsi-yü fan-kuo chih*," *Ming Studies*, 17 (Fall, 1983), pp. 49–59; "China and the Islamic world," In *As others see us: mutual perceptions, East and West*, eds. Bernard Lewis, et al. (New York, 1985), pp. 269–83; "Islam in China," *The encyclopedia of religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, 1987) 7, pp. 377–90.
- 2 A world order described in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese world order* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 1–19 and Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among equals: The Middle Kingdom and its neighbors, 10–14 centuries* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 1–4. The first emperor's injunctions about foreign relations are discussed in Lo Jung-pang, "Policy formulation and decision-making on issues respecting peace and war," *Chinese government in Ming times: Seven studies*, ed. Charles O. Hucker (New York, 1969), p. 52.
- 3 On the rise of merchants in the Ming, see Angela Hsi, "Social and economic status of the merchant class of the Ming dynasty" (Diss., University of Illinois, 1972); Bodo Wiethoff, *Die chinesische Seeverkehrspolitik und der private überseeandel von 1368 bis 1567* (Hamburg, 1963), pp. 142–70.

The Yung-lo emperor (r. 1403–24), however, often sided with the advocates of trade and increased contact with Inner Asia. His reign⁴ nonetheless was unique, and his policies were exceptions. Unlike the other Ming emperors, he actively encouraged an expansion of commerce and attempted to augment the number of embassies arriving in China. His usurpation of the throne and the ensuing questions about his legitimacy may have inspired him to seek such a flow of foreign emissaries, for, in the Confucian view, a good emperor naturally attracted the so-called barbarians to “come and be transformed” (*lai-hua*) – that is, to acknowledge the superiority of Chinese civilization by becoming increasingly sinicized. The more embassies, the more legitimate the Yung-lo emperor would appear to his own people. He was anxious to promote China’s political and economic participation in Asia, and his reign is referred to by a leading scholar as “one of the most aggressive periods in Ming history.”⁵ Yet his reign was atypical; most of the other Ming emperors tried to restrict dealings with foreigners.

THE SOURCES

The limitations of the sources impede a comprehensive study of the Ming’s relations with Inner Asia. The Jurchens of Manchuria had developed a written script but used it principally for seals and brief inscriptions, not for historical works. The Mongols’ conversion to Buddhism in the late sixteenth century shaped their historical sources, which focused on the religious organization, the legends, and the hagiography instead of on the Mongols’ political policies. Finally, the Central Asian and Persian sources scarcely dealt with China. The *Tārkh-i-Rāshidi*, the most important work on Central Asia during this era, does not, for example, refer to China.⁶ An account of travel to China by a Central Asian envoy offers valuable impressionistic views of the Ming court, but other texts scarcely yield a detailed description of the relations of the northwest frontier peoples with China.⁷

Thus, historians are dependent on the Chinese sources, which are fragmentary and, to say the least, biased. The scholars who compiled these records professed lack of concern for foreigners and foreign relations. They depicted foreigners as barbarians and scarcely accorded them much attention, offering

4 On the Yung-lo emperor, see David B. Chan, *The usurpation of the prince of Yen, 1398–1402* (San Francisco, 1975), which must be used with caution.

5 Edward L. Farmer, *Early Ming government: The evolution of dual capitals* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 104.

6 Ney Elias, ed., and E. Denison Ross, trans., *A History of the Moghuls of central Asia, being the Tarikh-i-Rashidi of Mirza Muhammad Haidar, Dughlat* (1841; rpt. New York, 1970), p. 63.

7 This travel account is translated in K. M. Maitra, *A Persian embassy to China* (New York, 1970).

scant information on the commercial and economic relations with the peoples of Central and Inner Asia. Even so, the *Veritable Records* (*Shih-lu*) of the Ming yield much information about diplomatic and tributary contact with these regions.⁸ But, until recently, few scholars have studied the Ming's relations with Inner Asia, and not long ago a book on Ming-Central Asian relations written in the nineteenth century was described as "not yet wholly superseded."⁹ The researches of Japanese, Chinese, and Western scholars over the past twenty years have contributed, however, to a clearer and more detailed knowledge of these relations.

The Chinese, in theory, had developed a system of coping with foreigners, which they implemented for much of their history. Under this system, China was perceived to be the Middle Kingdom and all other lands were labeled tributaries. The Chinese emperor was considered superior to all other rulers, who showed their respect and accepted their status as "vassals" by submitting periodic tribute to the Chinese throne. The frequency of tribute embassies, the number of men on each mission, and their route to the capital were all carefully regulated by the Chinese authorities. When they had an audience with the emperor, they performed the kowtow, a symbolic representation of their acceptance of the Chinese world order.

T. F. Tsiang, one of the leading advocates of this tribute system theory of foreign relations, asserted that China's main objective was the defense of the borders.¹⁰ It was scarcely, if at all, interested in pecuniary gain or in the objects brought by the foreigners. In fact, the court repeatedly bestowed gifts and honors and decorations (*ming-ch'i*) including the highly prized silk dragon robes, "the gift of which was equivalent to telling a foreign potentate that he could consider himself as a member of the family."¹¹ The gifts granted to the foreign envoys were much more lavish than the tribute items they conveyed to the court. Moreover, the trade they conducted with Chinese merchants was lucrative and beneficial for them, but not necessarily for the Chinese. Court officials emphasized the ceremonial features of the trade and tribute system and downplayed the commercial arrangements. T. F. Tsiang

8 Japanese scholars have performed a great service by extracting the materials on the Ming's relations with other parts of Asia from the voluminous records in the *Shih-lu*. The sections on Mongolia and Manchuria are found in Tamura Jitsuzō, *Mindai Man-Mō shiryō* (Kyoto, 1954-59), and the sections on Central Asia have been extracted in Junpei Ogiwara, *Mindai seiki shiryō* (Kyoto, 1974). Chan Hok-lam has done the same for Southeast Asia in his *Ming Shih lu chung chih tung nan Ya shih liao* (Hong Kong, 1968). See also Watanabe Hiroshi, "An index of embassies and tribute missions from Islamic countries to Ming China as recorded in the *Ming Shih lu* classified according to geographic area," *Memoirs of the research department of the Tōyō Bunko*, 33 (1975), pp. 285-347.

9 Charles O. Hucker, *China: A critical bibliography* (Tucson, 1962), p. 29, referring to E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval researches from Eastern Asiatic sources* (1910; rpt. New York, 1967).

10 T. F. Tsiang, "China and European expansion," *Politica*, 2 (March 1936), pp. 2-3.

11 Schuyler Cammann, "Presentation of dragon robes by the Ming and Ch'ing court for diplomatic purposes," *Sinologica*, 3 (1951-53), p. 194.

declared that "it must not be assumed that the Chinese court made a profit of such tributes."¹² T. C. Lin, another supporter of the traditional interpretation, added that "Chinese statesmen, up to recent decades, hardly looked upon trade and tribute with the eye of an economist."¹³ In fact, according to John Fairbank, "there was little benefit to the imperial treasury in anything that a tribute mission might bring."¹⁴ The Chinese needed none of the items offered by foreign envoys or merchants, and "trade was an annoying aspect of the system . . ."¹⁵

Though the foreign rulers appear to have been relegated to positions of inferiority under this system, they did obtain specific benefits. One is that they secured Chinese goods they needed and coveted. Textiles, grain, manufactured or craft articles, and tea were all dispatched by caravan to their lands or were purchased at specifically designated markets along the Chinese border. Second is that the prestige of the Inner Asian rulers was often bolstered when they were invested by the Chinese emperor. Third and closely related to the second is that they could, on occasion, count on Chinese support in case of foreign attack if their territories were considered vital to China's interests.

In recent years, this tribute system theory of foreign relations has been challenged and may require modification in light of recent studies. The Chinese could not always impose their own world order on Inner Asia, particularly under weak dynasties. Since they could not dominate the tribes and peoples in the surrounding steppe or desert lands, they were unable to maintain the restrictions on tribute and trade. Moreover, recent research suggests that some Chinese wanted and benefited from trade, and a few of the foreign goods imported into China were essential, not frivolous exotica. In addition, despite court disclaimers to the contrary, the Chinese were surprisingly well informed about the economies, the customs, and the political practices of their northern and western neighbors. Reports from envoys, border officials, and army officers offered valuable facts and insights concerning the peoples of Inner Asia. In short, the Chinese-imposed system of foreign relations did not wholly characterize Ming contacts with Inner Asia.

THE MONGOL THREAT

Court officials were most concerned about the recently expelled former rulers of China, the Mongols. The Hung-wu emperor had initially attempted to

¹² Tsiang, "China and European expansion," p. 4.

¹³ T. C. Lin, "Manchuria trade and tribute in the Ming dynasty," *Nankai Social and Economic Quarterly*, 9 (1937), p. 836.

¹⁴ John K. Fairbank, *Trade and diplomacy on the China coast* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 29.

¹⁵ Wang Yi-t'ung, *Official relations between China and Japan 1368-1549* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 3.

crush the Mongols and recapture the Inner Asian territories previously under Yuan control. But the defeats of his armies in the early 1370s compelled him to abandon such expansionism and accept a "lesser empire" for at least a decade and a half. In 1387, he dispatched an army which caused a strong Mongol force, under Naghachu, to surrender, and in 1388 his general, Lan Yü, defeated a powerful Mongol army, under their ruler Töghüs Temür.¹⁶ Yet no major military expeditions ventured far into the steppes or attempted to retain control over these lands.

Surprisingly, despite its fear of Mongol power, the Hung-wu court permitted some Mongols to reside in China. Sinicized Mongols or those weary of the precarious, constantly mobile lifestyle of a pastoral society were welcomed into China and were even permitted to settle in the strategic northwestern frontier areas. The court established guards (*wei*) composed of Mongols in Sha-chou and among the Ch'ih-chin mongols in western Kansu. To attract the Mongols and to retain their allegiance, the court offered gifts of clothing, housing, grain, and paper money and bestowed titles and patents of appointment on them. It also encouraged them to abandon their nomadic existence by providing them with land suitable for sedentary agriculture. Such a change in their lifestyle would foster assimilation and sinicization. Some Mongols found Chinese civilization attractive and did, in fact, accommodate. A few even performed valuable services for the court, including assignments as soldiers, envoys, and interpreters. Most proved to be loyal, for the Chinese sources scarcely refer to treasonous behavior. The few minor disturbances resulted from local conditions and were "mild affairs, without the slightest consequences."¹⁷ The court's reaction to these outbreaks was also mild, and the punishments accorded to the so-called rebels were lenient. The rationale was that "severe punishment would produce a bad impression among the tribes abroad who would be afraid to surrender in their turn to China."¹⁸

The Mongols outside the Chinese border were of greater concern and were less acquiescent. Though a Mongol force had been defeated toward the end of the Hung-wu reign, the Mongols as a whole had not been pacified. Indeed they continued to pose a challenge, if not a threat, throughout much of the history of the dynasty. Complete suppression of the various nomadic Mongol groups was exceptionally difficult, if not impossible. The Mongols were scattered and divided into so many different tribes that pacification of all these groups was impractical. Moreover, the Mongols, during the Ming, scarcely

16 *MS*, pp. 8465–6; Louis Hambis, *Documents sur l'histoire des Mongols à l'époque des Ming* (Paris, 1969), pp. 11–14.

17 Henry Serruys, "The Mongols in China during the Hung-wu period (1368–1398)," *Mélanges Chinois et bouddhiques*, 11 (1959), p. 245.

18 Serruys, "The Mongols in China," p. 246.

engaged the Chinese forces in full-scale battles. Small bands usually met the Ming troops and mostly encountered them on hit-and-run raids or what might be referred to as guerilla warfare. The Chinese soldiers could not pursue the fleeing Mongol troops because they were unaccustomed to the desert and steppe lands of Mongolia and did not have the supply lines necessary to conduct a lengthy pursuit of the elusive nomadic cavalry. The overwhelming victories described in the Ming sources must therefore be discounted. Chinese forces may, on occasion, have routed a specific Mongol tribe, but the great successes sometimes depicted in the Ming chronicles are suspect, and the figures for the Mongol dead and captured must be used with caution.

The obverse side is what this state of affairs reveals about Mongol political organization. The Mongols were simply unable to unite under one leader. At the height of the Mongol conquests in the thirteenth century, the leadership was centralized, but after the death of Chinggis Khan's son Ögödei in 1241, the territories under Mongol control became increasingly fragmented and no single leader (khaghan or "khan of khans") could control the Mongol domains. A regular, orderly system of succession to the khanate eluded the Mongols. Under one scheme, the most meritorious member of the Chinggisid line was to assume the title of khan, but identification of the most capable person often led to controversies, disputes, and warfare, which eroded the influence of the eventual successor.¹⁹ During the Ming, an additional complication was that powerful military men assumed control of a sizeable group and used members of the Chinggisid line as figureheads to legitimize their rule. Such attempts were effective only for short periods and created further division. No unified Mongol leadership developed, and this prevented the rise of a new Mongol empire.

Yet, the Mongols were potentially troublesome, and the Ming court needed to articulate a policy toward their northern neighbors. Chinese officials and emperors were, however, not consistent in their attitudes toward, treatment of, and relations with, the Mongols. They wavered from a lenient policy of permitting entry to a considerable number of embassies and trade missions, to a concerted effort to limit such contacts, to an aggressive attempt to control, and perhaps encroach upon, the Mongols' lands. Such variations in policy provoked resentment and hostility and precipitated some of the raids and attacks that plagued their relationship with the Mongols.

The Hung-wu emperor's armies had, on several occasions, defeated Mongol forces and appeared to have the upper hand. In 1378, the Mongol Khan, Ayushiridara, had died; in 1387, their leader, Naghachu, had been forced to

19 Joseph F. Fletcher, Jr., "The Mongols: Ecological and social perspectives," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 46, No. 1 (June, 1986), pp. 24–28.

submit; and the following year, their last powerful khan, Töghüs Temür, had been defeated by the armies of the Ming general Lan Yü and was eventually killed by one of his own relatives. The death of Töghüs Temür truly ended possible Chinggisid pretensions to leadership among the Mongols and perhaps to a renewal of Yüan power in China. From this time on, almost all the khans were puppets manipulated by ambitious military or political leaders.²⁰

Yet, the accession of the Yung-lo emperor in 1403 found relations with the Mongols unstable. The Chinese sources blame the implacably hostile Mongols for the tensions and conflicts. They do not ascribe rational motives for the Mongols' actions. The Mongols, in this view, raided Chinese border settlements because they were by nature plunderers and bellicose. Economic problems that bedeviled Sino-Mongol relations were scarcely mentioned, nor were the Mongols' legitimate grievances recorded in the Chinese sources.

Chinese accounts simply reported that the Yung-lo emperor faced hostile groups among the Eastern Mongols. Both the khan Kuei-li-ch'ih and his principal retainer Arughtai rejected the emperor's overtures to establish a tributary relationship. They also poisoned Engke Temür, a prince (*wang*) of the northwestern oasis of Hami whom the Chinese had approved of and had confirmed as the ruler of that vital gateway to the Western Regions. A conflict eventually erupted between the two Eastern Mongol leaders, which culminated in the killing of Kuei-li-ch'ih in 1408. Arughtai, the victor, did not assume the title of "khan" and instead recruited Bunyashiri, a descendant of the Mongol royal line, from the Central Asian town of Besh Balikh to replace his former ally but now deceased rival Kuei-li-ch'ih. Aware of these changes and seeking to capitalize on this turbulence, the Ming court sent an envoy named Kuo Chi to demand the dispatch of a tribute embassy.²¹ Arughtai responded by killing the Ming ambassador.

The Yung-lo emperor now attempted to use a divide and rule policy to pacify the Mongols. Favoring another of the Mongol confederations, he sought through gifts, titles, and privileges to secure an alliance against his more belligerent neighbors to the north. The Mongols he chose to support were the Oyirad or Western Mongols whose three chiefs were not as averse to dealing with the Ming and whose grazing lands were both in Western Mongolia and in the Zungharian steppelands north of the T'ien Shan. Having received three embassies from the Ming court in 1403, 1404, and 1407, their supreme leader, Mahmüd, sent a tribute mission to the Yung-lo emperor in 1408. The emperor responded enthusiastically to this mission because it not

²⁰ Hambis, *Documents*, translates the relevant sections of the *Ming shih* concerning these events.

²¹ See my biography of Arughtai in *DMB*, pp. 11–15 for additional details; also see the interpretation in Edward L. Dreyer, *Early Ming China: A political history, 1333–1433* (Stanford, 1982), pp. 177–82.

only contributed to the legitimacy he craved, but also revealed a sharp wedge between the Oyirad and the seemingly intractable Eastern Mongols. With alacrity, he gave the envoys lavish gifts and bestowed seals and titles on the three Oyirad leaders. Mahmūd was granted the title Shun-ning prince, and Batu Bolod and T'ai-p'ing were accorded the titles of An-lo prince and Hsien-i prince respectively.²² The Oyirad were doubtless more interested in the tangible economic opportunities implicit in a suitable relationship with China than they were in the purely ceremonial trappings and patents offered by the court. Trade was valuable, if not essential, for the Oyirad who needed Chinese grain and manufactured products. As long as they obtained commercial privileges, they were content to accept most of the conditions set by the Ming court. If they perceived of a means to secure a political or military advantage, they naturally seized the opportunity. In general, however, they remained relatively peaceful and, on occasion, cooperated with the Ming if they were granted trade and their independence from China was unchallenged or unless the court sided with their Mongol or Central Asian enemies. Such Ming policies gave rise to whatever conflicts beset their relations with the Mongols.

The early Ming court, from its standpoint, was baffled and disturbed by the unwillingness of the Mongols to accept the Chinese world order. Again, from his perspective, the Yung-lo emperor had been appalled by the unresponsiveness of the Eastern Mongols to his call for a tributary relationship and to their murder of his envoy. Thus he recruited, doubtless with implied and perhaps even explicit promises of additional trade and tribute, Mahmūd and his Oyirad forces to help him pacify the Eastern Mongols. Mahmūd gathered his troops for an eastern march in 1409. Encountering Arughtai and Bunyashiri north of Ninghsia in the Etsina region, he defeated their troops and compelled them to seek sanctuary around the Kerülen river. The Ming policy of divide and rule appeared to be successful. The Yung-lo emperor, trying to capitalize on the Eastern Mongols' disarray, dispatched a general named Ch'iu Fu with, according to the *Ming shih*, 100,000 crack cavalry to crush the recalcitrant Mongols. The figure of 100,000 seems to be an exaggeration, as organizing and provisioning such a large force, particularly in the grasslands, was scarcely possible in the limited time allotted for planning this expedition. The actual engagement between Ch'iu Fu and the Eastern Mongols involved, as recounted in the Ming chronicles, only 1,000 Ming cavalry, a less impressive but perhaps, more credible number. Overconfident as a result of the Oyirad victories, Ch'iu Fu was lured into a deadly trap.

²² Tu Jung-k'un, *Hsi Meng-ku shih yen chiu* (Wu-lu-mu-ch'i, 1986), pp. 64–65; Morris Rossabi, "Mahmūd," *DMB*, pp. 1035–36.

Upon arriving at the Kerülen river, his troops captured a Mongol who revealed that the enemy was disorganized and retreating chaotically. Acting on this intelligence, Ch'iu pursued the elusive forces farther into the steppes without taking into account or showing cognizance of the traditional Mongol tactic of a feigned retreat. Detached from his other troops, Ch'iu was vulnerable when Bunyashiri and Arughtai finally attacked, west of Onohu on the border between the Mongolian People's Republic and Heilungkiang. Ch'iu's troops were defeated, and he himself died in the ensuing battle.

News of this disastrous defeat galvanized the emperor to take personal charge of the military campaigns against the Eastern Mongols. As Prince of Yen before he assumed rule of the whole empire, the emperor had led numerous military campaigns. His activism resembled and was, in many ways, a continuation of the kind of military leadership emphasized by the Mongol khans. In this and in many of his other policies, the emperor harkened back to Yüan dynasty models, a continuity which the court did not recognize.²³

He planned the campaign in the winter of 1409 and set forth the following spring. Leading, according to the *Ming shih*, half a million men (though a more reliable estimate is 100,000), he reached the northern shores of the Kerülen where he had carved into the rocks: "Eighth year of the Yung-lo *keng-yin* (year), fourth month *ting-yu* (month), sixteenth day *jen-tzu* [May 19, 1410], the Emperor of the Great Ming passed here with six armies during the punitive expedition against the barbarian robbers."²⁴ Apparently intimidated by the size and power of the Ming army, Bunyashiri and Arughtai could not agree on a plan of action and simply moved in different directions, the descendant of the royal clan heading west, while the military leader migrated to the east. Ming troops dealt first with Bunyashiri, finally cornering and decisively defeating his troops at the Onon river on 15 June 1410. Bunyashiri escaped, but his power had eroded totally. The Yung-lo emperor next pursued Arughtai and apparently caught up with the Mongol chieftain at Ching-lu chen near the Taor river. Ming forces defeated Arughtai but not so decisively as portrayed in the Chinese chronicles, for he remained a vital force in East Asian politics for the next two decades.²⁵

A fragile truce developed between the court and Arughtai, but peace did not prevail everywhere along China's borderlands. Arughtai now sought

23 On Yung-lo's expeditions against the Mongols, see Wolfgang Franke's "Yung-lo's Mongolei-Feldzüge," *Sinologische Arbeiten*, 3 (1945), pp. 1-54 and his "Chinesische Feldzüge durch die Mongolei im frühen 15. Jahrhundert," *Sinologica*, 3 (1951-53), pp. 81-88.

24 V. M. Kasakevich, "Sources to the history of the Chinese military expeditions into Mongolia," *Monumenta Serica*, 8 (1943), p. 328.

25 Dimitri Pokouilov, *History of the eastern Mongols during the Ming dynasty from 1368 to 1644* (Chengtu, 1947), p. 28.

cooperation with the court, partly because of respect for Ming arms, but perhaps, even more important, because he appeared more confident of securing Chinese goods through trade. Late in 1410, he dispatched horses as tribute and in return was permitted to trade with Chinese merchants. For the next few years he deliberately cultivated good relations with the Ming court. When the threat posed by Arughtai dissipated, the Yung-lo emperor did not need to offer special privileges or to make concessions to the Oyirad. The court was thus not as hospitable to embassies from the Oyirad and to their desires for additional trade and tribute. The Oyirad chieftain, Mahmūd, would naturally take umbrage at such a change in attitude, particularly after what he believed to be the invaluable service of defeating and killing Bunyashiri and designating the latter's son Delbek, whom he treated as a puppet, to be the new khan. When the emperor denied his request for unusual rewards for his Oyirad underlings who had participated in the campaigns against Bunyashiri and Arughtai, Mahmūd vowed to avenge this insult. When envoys arrived from the Ming court, therefore, he detained them and indicated that he would challenge Chinese control along the borders, especially around modern Kansu and Ninghsia. The emperor in turn dispatched a eunuch envoy named Hai T'ung to secure the release of his ambassadors, but his efforts proved fruitless.

Both sides prepared for war, Mahmūd fearing a reconciliation between Arughtai and the Chinese directed against him, while the emperor, who, for the second time, led troops northward, was perturbed by the turbulence along the frontiers. The two armies finally clashed at a spot between the upper courses of the Tula and Kerülen rivers, and the ensuing battle took a heavy toll on both the Ming and the Oyirad. Arughtai had originally offered the lame excuse to the court that he was too ill to help, but once the battle ended, he capitalized on the weakened state of the Oyirad to harass and pursue them. Sometime late in 1415 or early in 1416, he caught up with, overwhelmed, and killed Mahmūd as well as the figurehead khan Delbek.

With the elimination of his Oyirad enemy, the Yung-lo emperor was in a stronger position to deal with the other Mongols. Simultaneously, Arughtai, having crushed the Oyirad, was eager to garner the rewards he believed he merited. He anticipated an expansion of trade with China, but all he received were titles for himself and his mother. When the commercial privileges were not granted, he retaliated by plundering a number of caravans traveling to and from North China. In 1422, he attacked and occupied the border fortress of Hsing-ho and killed its commander, prompting the third of the Yung-lo emperor's expeditions to Mongolia. The sizeable Chinese contingent, consisting supposedly of 235,000 men, so intimidated Arughtai that he fled into the steppelands, frustrating the Ming forces. Renewed attacks by Arughtai

led to the emperor's fourth expedition, in 1423, still another bothersome campaign as the Mongol ruler simply eluded the pursuing army. Capitalizing on the surrender of a Mongol commander named Esen Tügel, however, the emperor proclaimed the campaign a success and returned to China. Border tensions continued, with Arughtai mounting offensives against K'ai-p'ing and Ta-t'ung, and the following year the emperor initiated his fifth and last expedition. Again the Chinese army was unable to find the Mongols, as Arughtai had ordered them to retreat and to avoid military contact. While returning from this frustrating expedition, the emperor collapsed and died.²⁶

Lack of consistency bedeviled the Yung-lo emperor's relations with the Mongols. He sought to use the tactic of divide and rule, yet, when it succeeded, he often did not provide additional rewards to the one Mongol group which supported him against other recalcitrant and hostile confederations. He also attempted to determine the nature of commercial relations between the Ming and its northern neighbors. When a Mongol group which was denied trade reacted by raiding Chinese frontier settlements, he ignored traditional Chinese views cautioning against expansionism and personally led five campaigns into the steppelands, a policy that mirrored those of the Yüan rulers. His five expeditions hardly promoted the creation of a regular and peaceful relationship between the Ming and the Mongols.

After the Yung-lo emperor's death, and even more so after the end of the reign of the Hsüan-te emperor in 1437, the court abandoned some of its earlier policies. Expansionism was criticized for its expense and futility. Such far-flung expeditions as the Cheng Ho missions were discontinued. The court tried to discourage contact with foreigners and to reduce trade and tribute with neighboring and distant lands. A less activist foreign policy was pursued, and the renowned "Three Yangs" who dominated government in the late 1430s and early 1440s sought stability and peace through limitations on foreigners.

For the two decades that followed his death, the Ming pursued the Yung-lo emperor's tactic of divide and rule with similar results. At the beginning of this period, the court favored the Oyrat to counteract the Eastern Mongols. The Yung-lo emperor had cemented relations with the Oyrat after the death of Mahmūd by offering the title of *Shun-ning wang* to Mahmūd's son Toghon. With gifts from the Chinese court as well as relative peace, the Oyrat began to recover from the losses they had incurred, and Toghon appointed Toghto Bukha, still another descendant of the Mongol royal

²⁶ For these expeditions, see Franke's, "Yung-lo's Mongolei-Feldzüge," pp. 1-34 and his "Chinesische Feldzüge," pp. 81-88. On the Oyrat, see the dated but still useful article by Wu Ch'i-yü, "Who were the Oirats?," *The Yenching Journal of Social Studies*, 3, No. 2 (August 1941), pp. 174-219.

family, as a figurehead khan. As Toghon consolidated his power, he increasingly came into conflict with Arughtai who had elevated his own candidate, a certain A-t'ai, as khan of the Mongols. Recognizing the growing strength of the Oyirad, the Ming court now tried, through gifts and decorations, to ally itself with Arughtai, but could neither gain his support nor deter him from incursions on Chinese territory. Toghon ultimately was more successful, for, in 1434, after a series of military engagements, he defeated and killed Arughtai. China now faced a strong, unchallenged Mongol group on its borders and encountered difficulties in employing the policy of divide and rule.

Toghon, and especially his son Esen who succeeded him as the Oyirads' leader in 1439/1440, expanded their territory, leading them to seek a less restrictive relationship with the Ming. Under Esen, the Oyirad first moved westward, compelling the prince of the vital oasis of Hami to accept their overlordship, a severe blow to the Chinese who claimed that land as a tributary. Mongol tribes in the northwestern regions of Sha-chou and Ch'ih-chin were also intimidated and either forced to acknowledge Oyirad superiority or to seek sanctuary within China.²⁷ In 1447, Esen pressed forward toward the northeast, overwhelming the Uriyangkhad peoples just east of Mongolia.

Esen's domination of such a sizeable stretch of territory exacerbated his already hostile relations with the Ming. The Chinese court was even more concerned about what it perceived to be Esen's abuse of the tribute system. The number of tribute missions from the Oyirad grew dramatically in the 1440s, as did the number of men on each embassy. Instead of a few hundred men arriving with each mission, several thousand reached China, increasing the Ming's costs in transporting, feeding, housing, and offering gifts to the emissaries and their rulers. Such rising expenditures caused Chinese officials to limit the number of Esen's missions and to reduce the presents and products granted them in trade.²⁸ Esen's reaction was predictable. Accusing the Chinese of unfair commercial practices and of exploitation and mistreatment of his envoys, Esen prepared for a confrontation with the Ming court. The Grand Secretary, Yang Shih-ch'i, aware of the threat posed by Esen's forces, proposed that the court heighten its military preparations and provide additional horses and other war materials to its border troops. Ignoring Yang's entreaties, the court instead sought once again to use the divide and rule tactic, trying, this time, to sow dissension between Esen and the Khan Toghto Bukha. But Chinese officials misperceived the relationship between the two Mongol leaders, for they failed to recognize that Esen had monopolized poli-

27 Henry Serruys, "The Mongols of Kansu during the Ming," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, 10 (1955), pp. 311–12.

28 David M. Farquhar, "Oirat-Chinese tribute relations, 1408–1446," in *Studia Altaica: festschrift für Nikolaus Poppe* (Wiesbaden, 1957), p. 65.

tical power and maintained Toghto Bukha simply as a figurehead. Such misperceptions vitiated the use of the divide and rule strategy, which was inappropriate and ultimately led the Chinese into an armed confrontation with the Oyirad. The court, in any case, sought to ingratiate itself with the khan by offering him much more lavish gifts than he would ordinarily be entitled to. The results were disappointing, for the khan did not sever his relationship with Esen.

Tensions over trade and tribute as well as about territory finally erupted into warfare.²⁹ In July of 1449, Esen initiated a three-pronged assault against Ming China. He dispatched one army, led by Toghto Bukha, eastward to attack Liao-tung and another force southeastward to besiege Hsüan-fu and he led his own troops directly south toward Ta-t'ung.³⁰

Chinese reaction to this attack led to disaster. Two interpreters had already enraged Esen by pledging, without authorization, a Chinese princess in marriage to Esen's son, a pledge that was quickly forsworn by the court.³¹ The influential eunuch Wang Chen, who may have been implicated in the commercial exploitation of and the trade disputes with the Oyirad, had, according to the Chinese sources, also misled the Oyirad and the court. He repeatedly obstructed Esen's efforts to secure additional trade. Moreover, when Esen initiated his campaign, Wang persuaded the emperor to observe and personally lead the Chinese army in resisting the incursion. The Chinese accounts, which almost invariably portray eunuchs in the most unflattering light, castigated Wang for encouraging the emperor to join the expedition and make it appear that such imperial campaigns were unusual. Yet only three decades earlier the Yung-lo emperor had guided five expeditions against the Mongols. Wang was simply following the tradition established by one of the great Ming emperors.

The expedition, however, turned out to be ill-conceived. On setting forth from the capital, the emperor learned that Esen's forces had defeated a Ming garrison at Yang-ho, northeast of Ta-t'ung; the Chinese accounts attribute the defeat, in part, to one of the eunuch commanders dispatched by Wang Chen to manage the campaign. Nonetheless, a Ming army, composed of half a million men (perhaps again an inflated figure), proceeded to cross the Chü-yung gateway, past the inner line of the Great Wall. Despite repeated warnings to abandon the expedition and return to the safety of the Great

29 Frederick W. Mote, "The T'u-mu incident of 1449." In *Chinese ways in warfare*, eds. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 251 agrees with Henry Serruys that "what the Mongols needed most of all was reliable economic relations with China, and that if trade had been conducted in a manner reasonably satisfactory to them, war need not have occurred."

30 Philip De Heer, *The care-taker emperor* (Leiden, 1986), p. 16.

31 Rossabi, "Notes on Esen's pride," pp. 31-33.

Wall, Wang pushed on to Hsüan-fu and Ta-t'ung. In Ta-t'ung, he had second thoughts about the venture. Fearing that Esen was luring the Chinese forces into a trap, he ordered a hasty retreat to Hsüan-fu. Oyrad troops pursued them, however, and on 30 August caught up with and routed the rear guard of the Ming army. The following day, the imperial forces reached T'u-mu, a vulnerable postal station with an inadequate water supply. Both civilian and military officials pleaded with the emperor to continue their march on to the secure walled town of Huai-lai, only seven or eight miles away, but Wang, concerned that such a precipitous withdrawal might endanger the emperor's and his own personal caravans of valuables, opted to camp at T'u-mu to await the treasure-laden wagons. On the very next day, Esen's forces attacked and destroyed the imperial army, killing Wang and capturing the emperor.

But the Oyrad leader did not immediately capitalize on his unexpected victory. He waited for a month and a half to advance on Peking, allowing the Chinese the time to regroup and to prepare for an assault. Yü Ch'ien, the Minister of War who is portrayed as a heroic figure in the Chinese accounts, organized and inspired the inhabitants of the capital, secured court consent to enthrone the captured emperor's brother, the Prince of Ch'eng, later granted the reign title Ching-t'ai, and mobilized the population and resources for an expected attack. On 27 October, Esen reached the gates of the city³² and offered to ransom the emperor, an offer promptly rejected by the court. This rejection prompted Esen to besiege the city until 30 October, but he could not overrun the fortified posts defending Peking. He finally withdrew on learning that a relief force was on its way. After this failure, Esen adopted a more conciliatory policy, in part, to seek a resumption of commercial and tributary relations. He was also eager to repatriate the former emperor who had now become a liability. The newly enthroned emperor was understandably resistant to an immediate repatriation because of the possible challenges to his own position and legitimacy. Ultimately, his court advisers persuaded him not only to become more active in securing his brother's release but also that the former emperor was willing to retire. He dispatched a wily negotiator named Yang Shan to Esen's camp, and Yang, with a series of clever stratagems, succeeded in bringing back the old emperor.³³

This failure in diplomacy eventually led to Esen's downfall. Other Mongol chieftains capitalized on his difficulties to challenge his legitimacy. Toghto

32 On this savior of Peking, see Wolfgang Franke, "Yü Ch'ien, Staatsmann und Kriegsminister 1398–1457," *Monumenta Serica*, 11 (1946), pp. 87–122. On Yü's demise, see the same author's "Ein Dokument zum Prozess gegen Yü Ch'ien i. J. 1457," *Studia Serica*, 6 (1947), pp. 193–208.

33 See Li Shih, *Pei shih lu* and Yang Ming, *Cheng t'ung lin jung lu* for accounts of the emperor's captivity. See also Wu Chih-ho, "T'u mu chih pien hou ming ch'ao yü wa la chih chiao she," *Ming shih yen chiu chüan k' an*, 3 (September, 1980), pp. 101–3.

Bukha, the Khan in name only until that time, took this occasion to sever his relations with and initiate an attempt to depose Esen. The effort was doomed, as he was overpowered by Esen's troops in the winter of 1451 and was subsequently killed by local tribesmen as he fled eastward. Within a year and a half, Esen had assumed the rank of Khan, a self-destructive decision, for it alienated many conservative Mongols who disapproved of such an illegitimate usurpation of a title. He had, by this time, resumed tribute and commerce with China, but even this diplomatic success was insufficient to quell discontent within his ranks. In 1454, a rebellion erupted, and Esen himself was killed by the son of a man whom he had executed.

The death of Esen did not end Ming–Mongol hostilities. Divisions among the Oyirad prevented that Mongol group from posing a major threat to the Chinese court. Yet the defeat at T'u-mu and the subsequent challenges to China prompted the court to abandon its fortified guard posts that lay beyond the so-called Great Wall. From this time on, China, in effect, renounced the expansionist and more assertive policies associated with the Yung-lo emperor and his immediate successors. Many had opposed the policy of resuming relations with Esen and the Oyirad, but the newly entrenched emperor and Yü Ch'ien overrode this court faction and adopted a more conciliatory policy. One clear indication of their efforts at compromise was the emperor's addressing of Esen as Khan early in 1454 after the Oyirad ruler had adopted that title. Nonetheless, the lack of a buffer zone harmed the court in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries when its northern neighbors united and sought to annex additional territory. China became more vulnerable as a result.³⁴ For the Mongols, Esen's failure yielded useful lessons. First, unity was essential if they planned to play a vital role in East Asia. Second, the leader of such a unified Mongol confederation needed to be either a descendant of the Mongol royal family or a "grand marshal" (*tayisi*) like Esen, who did not overstep his bounds and assume the title of Khan.³⁵

In the late fifteenth century, Batu Möngke, a descendant of the royal family, tried to apply these lessons. Batu, who assumed the title of Dayan Khan, was the leader of the Eastern Mongols and first unified his own people.³⁶ After this success, he turned to asserting supremacy over the Oyirad who had been the dominant Mongol group since the death of Arughtai. By the early 1480s, he had crushed the most powerful chieftain among the Oyirad

34 De Heer, *The care-taker emperor*, pp. 1–3.

35 Henry Serruys, "The office of *Tayisi* in Mongolia in the fifteenth century," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 37, No. 2 (December 1977), pp. 353–80.

36 For Dayan Khan, see Okada Hidehiro, "Life of Dayan," *Acta Asiatica*, 11 (1966), pp. 46–55; Wada Sei, "A study of Dayan Khan," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Tōyō Bunko*, 19 (1960), pp. 1–42; and Henry Serruys, *Genealogical tables of the descendants of Dayan-qan* (The Hague, 1958).

and tried to capitalize on his unrivalled domination to dictate relations with the Ming. He demanded additional opportunities for trade with China, and when his bid was rebuffed, he simply plundered so that "from about 1480 on not a single year passed without some major Mongol raid across the Chinese north-western frontier."³⁷ His troops attacked from Ta-t'ung to Ninghsia, and the Chinese appeared helpless to halt these constant incursions. In 1506, the Cheng-te emperor appointed Yang I-ch'ing as the principal official in charge of border affairs, and Yang proposed the construction of fortifications along the northern and northwestern frontiers rather than stationing a huge standing army there. However, Yang had an eunuch adversary at court who convinced the emperor to reject his advice. Yang was compelled to retire from his post, and the Mongols continued their raids and incursions.³⁸

Dissensions among the Mongols prevented them from capitalizing on the opportunities they were proffered. Batu Möngke was, in part, responsible for creating such disunity by giving his son Ulus Bolod the title "Jinong", a covert attempt to have his progeny eventually appointed as his principal subordinate and successor. Other Mongol leaders resented this transparent ploy and broke ranks with the Khan, who was now compelled to withdraw some of his forces from the Chinese frontiers in order to cope with the challenges posed by these antagonists. Ulus Bolod was killed by Batu's enemies during one of these battles, and for the remainder of his life and career, Batu often fought against his own people. His major contribution was the unification of the Mongols of Inner Mongolia. But the dissension within his own ranks prevented him from posing a real threat to China's territorial integrity. His forces continued to raid Chinese soil until his death in the 1520s. Neither the Mongol Khan nor the Ming court could gain the upper hand.

The Altan Khan made one last effort to unite the Mongols in Ming times.³⁹ Evidence of this goal was his construction of a capitol at Kōke gota (Blue Font). As Batu Möngke's grandson, the Altan Khan inherited the mantle of leadership as well as the territories and tribes subjugated by his grandfather. Like his forebear, he was principally eager for trade and tribute, in part prompted by a devastating smallpox epidemic that afflicted the Mongols in the 1530s and 1540s. When he was denied such opportunities, he reacted

37 Roy Miller, "Batu Möngke," *DMB*, p. 18.

38 Pokotilov, *History of the eastern Mongols*, pp. 101–03. See also Wu Chih-ho, "Chih pien hou Ming ch'ao yü," pp. 75–99.

39 See Morris Rossabi, "Altan Khan." In *Encyclopedia of Asian history*, Vol. 1, ed. Ainslie Embree (New York, 1987), p. 50; Morris Rossabi, "Mongolia: From Chinggis Khan to Independence." In *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*, ed. Patricia Berger (New York, 1995), pp. 38–39; and Henry Serruys, "Altan Khagan," *DMB*, pp. 6–9.

with violent reprisals. In 1542, for example, he led raids that devastated the province of Shansi. The most troubling incident for the Chinese was the arrival of his forces within sight of Peking in 1550. Fearful of an Esen-like all-out war, the court finally made a concession by permitting a border trade in Mongol horses and Chinese silk. Shortly thereafter, the court suspended commerce when the Mongols requested grain in trade. Court response was conditioned on the fear that Mongol grain purchases were designed for Chinese defectors – that is, prisoners, law-breakers, or ordinary citizens who served the Mongols. The skills in administration, craftsmanship, and financial affairs offered by Chinese defectors could prove to be a challenge to China because they offered the Mongols the means not only to conquer but also to govern the Middle Kingdom.⁴⁰

The predictable result of the suspension in trade was that the Altan Khan persisted in raiding Chinese border areas until a settlement was reached in 1571. Disorder along the frontiers harmed both the Ming, who expended vast sums for defense, and the Mongols, who were weary of the constant warfare. The two sides were ready for a compromise, and the Ta-t'ung Governor-General, Wang Ch'ung-ku, took the initiative, persuading the court to seek an agreement. Trade markets were permitted on the frontiers, and the Altan Khan was allowed to bring 500 horses, as annual tribute, to the Chinese borders and could receive Chinese products in return. The court also granted the Altan Khan the title "Shun-i wang" (obedient and Righteous Prince) and granted lesser titles to his subordinates. But the Ming insisted on the return of several of the most prominent defectors, who were subsequently executed. This agreement, which permitted a flow of tribute and trade from the Mongols, together with the building of walls along the northern frontiers, reduced much of the turbulence along the Sino-Mongol border for the dynasty.⁴¹ Divide and rule was not emphasized as a policy during this era.

The Altan Khan's conversion to Buddhism also contributed to stability. Lama Buddhism had been introduced to the Mongols in the thirteenth century by the Tibetan Buddhist monks, the Sa-skya Pandita and his nephew, the 'Phags-pa lama, who served as Khubilai Khan's instructor in Buddhism and who was granted the title State Preceptor (Kuo-shih) and offered jurisdic-

40 Henry Serruys, "Chinese in southern Mongolia during the sixteenth century," *Monumenta Serica*, 18 (1959), pp. 26–66. On the significance of the smallpox epidemic, see Carney T. Fisher, "Smallpox, salesmen, and sectarians: Ming-Mongol relations in the Jiajing reign (1522–67)," *Ming Studies*, 25 (Spring, 1988), pp. 4–8.

41 See the comprehensive study by Henry Serruys in "Four documents relating to the Sino-Mongol peace of 1570–1571," *Monumenta Serica*, 19 (1960), pp. 1–66; some Mongols actually served the Ming as early as the beginning of the dynasty. See Henry Serruys, "Mongols ennobled during the early Ming," *HJAS*, 22 (1959), pp. 209–60. For more on the significance of Altan Khan, see Arthur Waldron, *The great wall of China* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 159–64.

tion over Tibet by his erstwhile student.⁴² Traces of Buddhism survived into the Ming period, but it was not pervasive and lacked support from the elite. The Altan Khan recognized the need for a religion that would serve as a unifying force for the Mongols. Shamanism was too unsophisticated and disorganized and did not have literary or cultural richness. The universalistic religion of Buddhism, with its greater formality, more complex organization, and profusion of texts, provided a more suitable vehicle and symbol for unity. In 1577, the Altan Khan, therefore, invited the leader of the Yellow Sect dGe-lugs-Pa order of Tibetan Buddhism to meet with him. The meeting, which took place in Ch'ing-hai in 1578, resulted in the conversion of the Altan Khan to Buddhism and in the mutual granting of titles. The Tibetan cleric pronounced Altan Khan to be a reincarnation of Khubilai Khan, and the Mongol leader granted him the title Dalai Lama (Oceanic, or Universal, Lama).⁴³ By the time of the Altan Khan's death in 1582, only a relatively small percentage of the Mongols had turned to Buddhism, but the prospect of large-scale conversions concerned the Chinese. Religious unity might translate into political unity and centralization, a prospect that frightened the Chinese. The potential for a secular alliance between Tibet and the Mongols was also troubling. Such an alliance might further subvert the traditional divide and rule policy. At least a century elapsed, however, before Buddhism became widespread among the Mongols. As it turned out, the potential for a secular alliance between the Mongols and the Tibetan Buddhists was limited and shortly thereafter they themselves severed their spiritual relations. Anxious to avert spiritual domination by foreigners, the Mongols, in the seventeenth century, selected one of their own people as the Bogdo Gegen, to serve as the leader of their religion.⁴⁴

Chinese fears about Buddhism were misplaced. Their concern that conversion to Buddhism would lead to a growing militancy and urge to spread the religion through the use of force turned out to be an erroneous assumption. Instead, in the Ch'ing dynasty, a large percentage of Mongol males became monks, resulting eventually in a dulling of their military skills. Buddhism's emphasis on pacifism and its opposition to bloodletting may also have inhibited the rise of a powerful military force in the Mongol tradition. The Altan

42 A recent discussion of the influence of this remarkable lama is found in Herbert Franke, "Tibetans in Yuan China." In *China under Mongol rule*, ed. John D. Langlois (Princeton, 1981), pp. 305–12.

43 On the earlier introduction of Buddhism into Mongolia, see the articles by Henry Serruys, "Remarks on the introduction of Lamaism into Mongolia," *Mongolia Society Bulletin*, 7 (1968), pp. 62–63; and "Early Lamaism in Mongolia," *Oriens Extremus*, 10 (October, 1963), pp. 181–216. Also see Charles R. Bawden, *The modern history of Mongolia* (New York, 1968), pp. 24–32.

44 Charles R. Bawden, *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu of Urga* (Wiesbaden, 1961) offers an account of the lives and careers of these "Living Buddhas." On the introduction of Lama Buddhism, see also Larry W. Moses, *The political role of Mongol Buddhism* (Bloomington, 1977), pp. 108–23.

Khan's dream of a unified Mongol domain, based upon the common bond of Buddhism, simply failed to materialize. Though raids and incursions, on the one hand, and trade, on the other, continued in Ming-Mongol relations, the lack of Mongol unity prevented them from capitalizing on China's weakness in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Yet, this disunity did not result from the divide and rule tactics of the Ming court. Instead, indigenous developments, such as opposition to a sedentary lifestyle among some of the Mongol peoples, contributed to their inability to organize into a powerful empire. Moreover, questions of legitimacy and the difficulty of devising a fixed, orderly system of succession impinged upon the possibility of unity. As noted earlier, such difficulties had bedeviled the nomadic peoples of Inner Asia from earliest times.

Despite the frequently turbulent political relationship between the Ming and the Mongols, trade and tribute persisted for much of the dynasty. As the leading scholar of these relations has stated, "wars, however, never interrupted the tribute relations for more than a few months at a time; even while the emperor was a captive in Esen-tayisi's camp, surprising as this may be, tribute relations continued, although on a reduced scale."⁴⁵ These economic relations were complicated and entailed a wide variety of different arrangements, though they could, in general, be categorized as tribute and gifts in response, trade in the capital, and trade along the border, primarily in horses. Neither the Chinese nor the Mongols kept accounts of commercial or tributary transactions. The Mongols failed to do so partly because record-keeping was not part of their heritage and partly because most of them were illiterate. The Chinese court's antipathy toward commerce and its scorn for merchants prompted a lack of interest in preserving accounts of foreign trade and tribute. Only sketches of the economic relations can be attempted.

Mongol tribute embassies arrived regularly in China with items to offer to the Emperor and the court. Listings in the Veritable Records (*Shih-lu*) yield a fairly complete register of the embassies and at least a catalog of the most significant products they presented to the Ming rulers. Horses are mentioned as tribute goods for nearly every Mongol mission, an indication of the value accorded them by the court. Though the court frequently complained about the poor quality of the horses presented, such tribute offerings were useful because China lacked sufficient steeds for its defense. The Ming emperors were anxious to secure horses and were pleased with such offerings, though they also sought to obtain these essential animals through trade and through

45 Henry Serruys, *Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II: The tribute system and diplomatic missions (1400–1600)*, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, 14 (1967), p. 9.

confiscation from captive Mongols. Camels were brought by Mongol missions, but furs from the eastern part of Mongolia were more frequently listed as tribute items. All of these products were useful and not the wasteful or luxurious commodities that elicited complaints from the scholar official class.

Ming emperors reciprocated with gifts for the envoys and their rulers. Some of these presents were outright gifts, which were accorded to envoys, retainers, and chieftains on the basis of Chinese perceptions of their status, power, and wealth. Such gifts included silks, satin, cotton goods, boots, stockings, and hats. Other presents were really specific payments for the tribute items. Well-worked out formulas for the exchange of goods are clearly spelled out in several Ming sources, particularly in the *Ta Ming hui tien* (*Collected statutes of the Ming dynasty*).⁴⁶ A tribute of horses received a specified amount of silk, satin, or paper money, or other commodities. This exchange was, in effect, trade, despite the Chinese label of “tribute.”

Trade at the capital was conducted principally at the Hui t'ung kuan (College of Interpreters) where the embassies were lodged. Envoys and merchants were permitted three to five days to trade, under carefully prescribed circumstances, with Chinese merchants. The court imposed numerous restrictions on this trade. Chinese merchants needed clearance from the court before receiving permission to trade, their profits were monitored because, in the court's view, “the exchange of goods must be just to both parties;”⁴⁷ and products such as satin, history books, weapons, and metals were contraband. Ordinary citizens and the military were banned from participation in this commerce. Yet, judging from the repeated proclamations announcing stiffer punishments for violations, these restrictions could not readily be enforced. Some Mongol guards and merchants openly violated the regulations while others simply evaded them without much fanfare. Smuggling perennially troubled the Ming authorities, though Chinese merchants participated in and profited from such illegal commerce.⁴⁸ Similarly, some ordinary Chinese as well as soldiers engaged in trade without court permission. Both the Chinese and the Mongols appear to have benefited from this trade. Otherwise, they would have abided by court regulations. Ming officials frowned on such commerce and repeatedly proclaimed that China gained nothing at all from these transactions. Yet, individual Chinese undoubtedly reaped valuable returns from commerce with the Mongols. They obtained horses and animal products while providing cotton and silk textiles, paper money, grain, iron kettles, and medicines. Since the Mongols were subject to famine due to

46 *TMHT*, pp. 1603–6.m.

47 Serruys, “Sino-Mongolian relations,” p. 430.

48 Kawagoe Yoshihino, “Min-Mō kōshōka no mitsubōeki,” *Mindai shi kenkyū*, 3 (1974), pp. 17–32.

drought and other natural catastrophes and had little surplus due to their nomadic lifestyle, they desperately needed trade with the Chinese. When trade was conducted, therefore, the Mongols were quiescent, but, when it was interrupted, they reacted violently.⁴⁹

Sino-Mongol trade along the borders centered on horses. Horse markets were initiated as early as the 1430s in Ta-t'ung, but it was only during the Altan Khan's reign that such trade fairs convened regularly. After the Altan Khan's troops had reached the gates of Peking in 1550 and intimidated the Ming, he coerced the court into establishing horse fairs at Ta-t'ung and Hsüan-fu along the northern frontiers of China, but disputes over the conduct of trade disrupted and then brought the fairs to an end. As a result of the peace negotiated in 1570-71, however, the horse fairs were resumed. The Chinese received army horses, cattle, and sheep while the wealthy Mongols obtained satins and silks and the poor secured cotton textiles, needles, and everyday artifacts. Court officials acquiesced to the fairs in the belief that they could more readily control the Mongols. If the Mongols raided Chinese soil, the fairs would be suspended. Expenses for the fairs were borne by the Chinese authorities, and despite some complaints by local officials, "the central government seems to have felt intuitively that, all in all, these expenses were not extravagant, and any way, that the fairs could no longer be abolished without doing even greater harm to the country."⁵⁰

The Ming court often assumed the expenditures for Mongol envoys and merchants. In the early fifteenth century, the costs were not excessive, but later, as the size of the embassies grew, the financial burdens also increased. Banquets and entertainments for the envoys became ever more expensive. Both sides complained about the inferior products offered to them, and the Ming court was concerned about smuggling, subsidies it provided for Mongol princes, and spying by Mongol travelers. Yet, trade and tribute persisted almost without interruption until the very end of the dynasty, because these economic relations generally benefited both sides.

THE MING AND THE DISUNITED LAND OF THE LAMAS

Tibet, which had extensive contacts with China during the Yüan, scarcely had diplomatic relations with the Ming. Under the Mongol dynasty, Tibet was governed by a lama of the Sa-skya sect and by an official known as a *dpon-*

49 Henry Serruys, "Sino-Mongolian trade during the Ming," *Journal of Asian History*, 9, No. 1 (1975), pp. 37-8.

50 Henry Serruys, *Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming III: trade relations: The horse fairs (1400-1600)*, *Mélanges Chinois et bouddhiques*, 17 (1975), p. 221.

chen, both of whom were appointed by the Yüan court. The early Mongol rulers exercised power through these authorities and maintained relatively effective control until the 1320s when succession struggles, economic dislocations, and natural disasters weakened and eventually led to the collapse of the dynasty. Khubilai Khan had been, in large part, responsible for developing a patron to priest relationship with the 'Phags-pa lama, by which the cleric was granted jurisdiction over Tibet, in return for accepting Mongol overlordship and providing religious legitimacy for the Mongol Khan. After Khubilai's death, however, relations between the Mongol Khans and the Tibetan Buddhists of the 'Phags-pa lama's sect, the Sa-skya, became less intimate.⁵¹

By the time the Hung-wu Emperor established the Ming dynasty, Tibet and China were hardly in touch. The early Ming Emperors' interest in Tibetan Buddhism, however, was one factor leading to the resumption of relations. Another was proper delineation of the Sino-Tibetan border and the resulting cessation of hostilities along the frontiers. Still another was Ming desire for Tibetan horses, which could be obtained in a tea-horse trade.⁵²

Like the early Mongol Khans, the first rulers of the Ming were fascinated by the religions of Tibet. The Hung-wu emperor, who had entered a Buddhist monastery on the death of his parents and who had witnessed the role of Buddhism as an anti-Yüan ideology in the waning years of the previous dynasty, was sympathetic to Buddhism and seems to have been impressed by the value of Tibetan Buddhism. As a recent study has noted, the Hung-wu emperor was "well aware of the degree to which Buddhism flourished in Tibet and of the link that this created between Tibet and China."⁵³ In 1378, he even sent a Buddhist monk named Tsung-lo as an envoy to Tibet to collect as many unique Buddhist texts as possible.⁵⁴ Similarly, the Yung-lo emperor was well-disposed toward Buddhism, having been assisted in his usurpation of power by the Buddhist monk Yao Kuang-hsiao.

On the other hand, disputes along the Tibetan border plagued Chinese authorities. Tibet posed no true threat to China, but the early Ming court, on several occasions, pointed to T'ang dynasty parallels as a means of high-

51 On the Yüan rule in Tibet, see Herbert Franke, "Tibetans in Yüan China," pp. 296–328; Luciano Petech, "Tibetan relations with Sung China and with the Mongols," *China among Equals*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 10–14, pp. 179–94; and Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: the Yuan Sa-skya Period of Tibetan History* (Rome, 1990).

52 Satō Hisashi, "Mindai Chibetto no hachi tai kyō-ō ni tsuite," *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 21 (1962), pp. 295–314; 22 (1963), pp. 203–25; and 22 (1964), pp. 448–503; also his "Mindai Chibetto no Rigompa no keitō ni tsuite," *Tōyō gaku*, 45 (1963), pp. 434–52; and Heather Karmay, *Early Sino-Tibetan art* (Warminster, 1975).

53 Elliot Sperling, "Early Ming policy toward Tibet: An examination of the proposition that the early Ming emperors adopted a 'divide and rule' policy toward Tibet" (Diss., Indiana University, 1983), p. 42.

54 Kazuo Enoki, "Tsung lo's mission to the Western Regions in 1378–1382," *Oriens Extremus*, 19 (1972), pp. 47–53.

lighting the dangers from the land of the lamas. In the early and middle years of the T'ang, Tibetan troops had repeatedly created disturbances along the frontiers. Since the Ming perceived that the true threat now derived from the Mongols, the northern border of Tibet was vital. Repeated border skirmishes afflicted the Sino-Tibetan frontier in early Ming, and the early emperors were eager to quell these disturbances and create a more lasting peace. Thus the early Ming court sought to make contact with Tibetan leaders in order to prevent such conflict.

The early Ming emperors cherished Tibetan horses as much as they did Mongol steeds. As early as the Sung dynasty, an extensive tea-horse trade was conducted along China's northern and western frontiers. The government imposed a monopoly on tea, which offered it the opportunity to determine the conditions of trade in the tea-horse exchange. Tibetans sought to obtain brick tea from China both as a beverage and for Buddhist religious ceremonies.

Though the Hung-wu emperor sent the first envoys to Tibet, the Yung-lo emperor was the first Ming ruler actively to seek an extension of relations with Tibet. Some scholars have suggested that the Yung-lo emperor adopted a successful "divide and rule" policy to defuse the threat posed by the Tibetans. Such an interpretation attributes too much influence to the Chinese. In fact, Tibet was divided from the very beginning of the Ming dynasty, as numerous monastic groups vied for power, with no single sect or monastery having dominance. The Sa-skya-pa order, which the Mongols had patronized, no longer was the principal religious or secular force in the land. Disunity was characteristic of Tibet at that time and was not influenced by Chinese policies.⁵⁵

The Yung-lo emperor, prompted by his desire for legitimacy and his eagerness to obtain horses, to secure peace along the borders, and to learn more about Buddhism, initiated efforts to resume relations with Tibet. In 1403, he dispatched an envoy named Hou Hsien with an invitation to the fifth hierarch of the Karma-pa order to come to China. His letter to the Fifth Karma-pa reveals both an interest in Tibetan Buddhism and a "reflection of his wish to present himself as a filial son of T'ai-tsu [i.e. the Hung-wu emperor] and his empress, in this instance, by seeking to have rites performed on their behalf by a religious figure of the stature of the chief hierarch of the Karma-pa subsect."⁵⁶ An attempt to bolster his legitimacy doubtless was one factor that motivated him to extend the invitation, which the Fifth Karma-pa accepted. The Tibetan cleric arrived in Nanking in 1407 and was welcomed with grand-

55 Hugh E. Richardson, *Tibet and its history*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, 1984), pp. 36–37.

56 Sperling, "Early Ming policy," pp. 78–79.

iose feasts and banquets and was granted elaborate gifts. The emperor even constructed a special temple for him and his entourage. In return, the Fifth Karma-pa performed Buddhist rituals and blessings for the emperor's dead parents and instructed the emperor and his principal consort. Two months after his arrival, the Emperor awarded him the title *ta-pao fa-wang*, the same title granted to the 'Phags-pa lama during the Yüan dynasty. He implied, in this way, that he was eager to establish the same relationship with Tibet as had been initiated by Khubilai Khan, with the land of the lamas accorded the position of a dependency, and the Karma-pa hierarchs acting as the rulers and the agents for Ming rule. The Fifth Karma-pa rejected such a relationship and instead encouraged the emperor to bestow titles on religious leaders from other sects.⁵⁷ In effect, the Yung-lo emperor's granting of titles and presents to a wide variety of hierarchs was not a deliberate implementation of the "divide and rule" policy.

A number of Tibetan clerics visited China during the Yung-lo era. The emperor rewarded them all and granted them titles, receiving, in return, religious instruction. He failed, however, to persuade the most renowned Tibetan cleric to travel to the Middle Kingdom. This monk, Tsong-kha-pa, had, in the late fourteenth century, tired of the lamas' active involvement in politics and developed his own order (the dGe-lugs-pa or "model of Virtue"), which emphasized meditation and strict monastic discipline and deemphasized participation in secular affairs. He attracted a wide following and was soon revered as one of the holy men of the land because he rejected the worldliness of many of the rival monastic orders.⁵⁸ The Yung-lo emperor learned of him, and, in 1407, sent an embassy to persuade him to come to China. Tsong-kha-pa declined the invitation, citing the length and arduousness of the journey as well as his own ill health as reasons. In 1413, the emperor sent still another embassy, led by the eunuch Hou Hsien, to convince the Tibetan cleric to travel in person to the court. This time Tsong-kha-pa again rejected the invitation, but, not wishing to alienate the emperor of China, sent one of his disciples to the Ming court. This Tibetan mission reached China in 1415 and was greeted with much fanfare and numerous gifts, and, in return, the disciple, Shakya ye-shes, prayed for the emperor's longevity and performed magical feats and religious services. He made such a favorable impression that, on his departure in 1416, the court provided him with gold and

57 Elliot Sperling, "The 5th Karma-pa and some aspects of the relationship between Tibet and the early Ming." In *Tibetan studies in honour of Hugh Richardson*, eds. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (Warminster, 1979), p. 284.

58 On Tsong-kha-pa, see David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural history of Tibet* (Boulder, 1980), pp. 180–82 and for more detail, see Rudolf Kaschewsky, *Das Leben des lamaistischen Heiligen Tsongkhapa Blo-Bzan-Grags-pa (1317–1419)* (Wiesbaden, 1971).

silver vessels, together with presents for Tsong-kha-pa. Other Tibetan clerics also reached the court during Yung-lo's reign and were rewarded with silver, silk robes, brocaded silk, and tea.

Most of the Yung-lo emperor's dealings with the Tibetans had scant political overtones. The activities the monk-envoys engaged in were primarily spiritual or ceremonial. Little of political note transpired, though the arrival of these Tibetan monks contributed to the emperor's political legitimacy. The Tibetan clerics clearly did not perceive themselves to be vassals of the Ming court. Their arrival may have facilitated trade but had little political significance. The only issue the emperor broached with them was the reestablishment of postal relay stations that would facilitate travel and trade between China and Tibet.

Interest in safe passage between the two lands was prompted by the Ming's desire for trade, in particular for Tibetan horses. Chinese courts traditionally had been unable to breed war horses and thus had to obtain them from foreigners. Tibetans brought horses to the borders and traded for Chinese tea. A specific exchange ratio for different qualities of horses and tea was worked out, so that this was truly trade rather than an inequitable tributary arrangement. A Horse Trading office (*ch'a-ma ssu*), which will be discussed later, was established to supervise and control the trade. The court tried to maintain a monopoly on tea in order to regulate the prices in China's favor. Often, however, smugglers intruded and undermined the court's efforts to control this trade. They provided tea to the Tibetans at a lower cost than the government, sabotaging its attempt at monopoly.

Neither in the economic nor in the political realms did the Tibetans perceive themselves to be subjects of the Ming court. In addition, they maintained relations with other states and peoples without intercession by the Chinese. Most important was the contact with the Altan Khan of the Mongols. The leader of the dGe-lugs-pa sect, in order to boost his own legitimacy in relation to rival Buddhist sects, met, as we have seen, with and converted the Mongol ruler, creating the potential for a formidable alliance. Such a union seemed even more likely when the Altan Khan's great grandson was selected as the Fourth Dalai Lama early in the seventeenth century. But a confederation of Tibetans and Mongols was not achieved; nor did Mongol support lead to the immediate victory of the dGe-lugs-pa order over all its rivals. Clearcut supremacy for the Dalai Lamas came only in the 1640s when the military forces of the Güüshi Khan of the Khoshuud Mongols crushed their opponents.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Tsebon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A political history* (New Haven, 1967), pp. 103–14; Hugh E. Richardson, *Tibet and its history*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, 1984), p. 41.

CENTRAL ASIA: DIMINISHING RELATIONS WITH CHINA

Mongol rule had enabled China to be in touch, via Central Asia, with Persia, the Middle East, and Europe, but the early Ming court was less eager to maintain such an extensive commercial and cultural network. Eurasian trade, which had flourished during the Yüan, appeared to be of scant significance to the Hung-wu emperor. Defense against the Mongols, who nomadized along China's northwestern frontiers as well as in present-day Mongolia, and opposition to the primarily Turkic peoples of the region, were the emperor's vital concerns. Since creation of a buffer zone on the northwestern border was a principal foreign policy objective, he sought to create an aggressive posture in dealing with the neighboring peoples and oases. He wished to dislodge Mongols and other enemies from the northwestern passage, but once he controlled this region, he would not attempt to maintain relations with the West. China's relations with Central Asia and the Middle East would contract during this era.

The court would focus on the neighboring regions of modern Sinkiang and deemphasize links with the more distant areas of Central Asia: links which had been maintained during much of the Yüan period. Within Sinkiang itself, the Ming rulers sought either control or good relations with the primarily Uighur inhabitants of the Tarim river basin oases. These peoples, who generally lived south of the T'ien Shan (Heavenly Mountains) and depended on the waters descending from the mountains, practiced a self-sufficient form of agriculture which was supplemented by trade to the West and with the neighboring nomadic peoples of northern Sinkiang, including the Kazakhs, the Kirghiz, and the Mongols. The ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of these towns facilitated commerce, as merchants from West Asia were assured of a fine reception and of finding inhabitants who could speak their language or practiced the same religion or customs. A Persian traveler of the early fifteenth⁶⁰ century noticed that in one of these towns the Amir "had built a magnificent mosque, facing which they had constructed a Buddhist temple of a very high size,"⁶¹ an indication of its heterogeneity.

The court was not as involved with the nomads of Zungharia or with the farther reaches of Central Asia. Zungharia, the grasslands of northern Sinkiang, which contrasted sharply with the mostly desert, though dotted with oases, environment of the south, had been the center of a pastoral economy for centuries. Lack of unified leadership prevented the nomads of Zungharia

60 Henry Yule, *The book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian concerning the kingdoms and marvels of the East*, rev. Henri Cordier, 3rd ed. (London, 1903), vol. 1, pp. 209–10.

61 K. M. Maitra, *A Persian embassy to China* (New York, 1934; rpt. New York, 1970), p. 14.

from having direct, continuous relationships with the Chinese because the Ming preferred to deal with prominent rulers. Some trade was conducted between Chinese merchants and officials and the nomadic chieftains because the latter needed products from the sedentary world and traded both with the oases and the Chinese. They were disruptive principally when the oasis states or kingdoms or the Ming rulers imposed limitations on commerce. Yet, the sources on their relations with the Ming are meager because the Chinese accounts focused on the established principalities.

The first Ming involvement with Uighuristan, or southern Sinkiang, resulted from pacification of northwestern China. In 1372, Feng Sheng defeated remnants of the Yüan armies in Kansu and established guards (*wei*) in Uighur districts adjacent to the Chinese border. By⁶² 1380, Ming campaigns had opened the road to Hami, the gateway to the Western Regions, and, by 1391, the Left Assistant Commissioner-in-Chief (*Tso tu-tu ch'ien-shih*), Liu Chen, led his troops into Hami.⁶³ Yet he withdrew his forces shortly thereafter. The court clearly did not want to maintain an expensive and extensive supply line that stretched to Hami, nor could it contemplate the costly stationing of an occupation force in this oasis. Its principal objective was simply to weaken Hami and to prevent its use as a staging area for attacks on China. Control of the oasis by a belligerent power would pose a serious threat to the Chinese borderlands. The Hung-wu emperor, through his support of these military campaigns, had temporarily averted domination of Hami by a hostile state or people, but no true diplomatic relationship had been effected by the end of the first emperor's reign. It was only with the ascension of his son, the Yung-lo emperor, the third ruler of the dynasty, that a more binding relationship was developed.

Neither did the Hung-wu emperor establish a solid and workable arrangement with the more distant states of the so-called Western Regions. The Chinese accounts of the Hung-wu period record official "embassies" from the Central Asian ruler Temür (Tamerlane), who had, by this time, conquered and governed Persia, much of the Middle East, and Northern India. These "embassies" were doubtless mercantile enterprises led by Central Asian merchants eager to trade with China; Temür had no connection with these essentially commercial missions. The merchants cleverly portrayed themselves as official emissaries and presented letters, purportedly from Temür, which treated the Chinese emperor as the superior ruler. Having faith in these forged missives, the Hung-wu emperor, in 1395, sent an embassy led by Fu An and the eunuch Liu Wei to congratulate and to express gratitude to Temür for

62 MSL, *T'ai-tsu shih lu*, 74, pp. 2b-3a. 63 MSL, *T'ai-tsu shih lu*, 211, p. 3b.

the proper performance of his duties as a vassal of the Chinese throne.⁶⁴ Temür took umbrage at this patronizing description of his relationship with the emperor and immediately detained the envoys. A second embassy, which departed from China in 1397, met the same hostile reception and was prevented from returning to its homeland. Temür, who had heard wildly exaggerated stories about the persecution of Muslims in China, determined to avenge himself both for the court's disdainful attitude toward him and for its mistreatment of his co-religionists. Ming relations with the Central Asian conqueror were clearly unsettled.

There was no regular flow of trade and tribute between China and the Tarim river oases and the farther regions of Central Asia. Certain essential products such as horses and camels, and certain luxuries such as jade and so-called Muslim blue dye, the vital ingredient for blue and white porcelains, were not reaching China. An equitable commercial and tributary arrangement had also not been achieved.

As in the case of Tibet, the Yung-lo emperor took the initiative in fostering a harmonious relationship with the Western regions. He founded a College of Translators (*Ssu-i kuan*) and a College of Interpreters (*Hui-t'ung kuan*) to train translators and interpreters in the wide variety of languages spoken by envoys to the court, an indication of his eagerness to cultivate foreigners. As soon as he assumed power, he dispatched an embassy to Hami, the Tarim basin oasis closest to China, to prompt amicable diplomatic and economic exchanges. Within a few months, the local prince, Engke Temür, reciprocated with tribute offerings of horses which so pleased the emperor that he, in turn, awarded the title Ching-shun wang (Righteous and Prosperous Prince) to Hami's ruler.⁶⁵ Though the emperor established a Ming guard (*wei*) in Hami, it seems clear that the court did not govern the region nor could it count on receiving taxes or military support. Creation of a so-called guard was simply *pro forma* and did not translate into political control.

On one occasion, however, the Yung-lo emperor tried to go beyond influence to actual domination over Hami. Toghto (T'o T'o), a descendant of the royal family of Hami, had been reared at the Chinese court and imbibed Chinese values, and the emperor planned to install him on the throne to capitalize on his pro-Chinese sympathies. Early in 1405, Engke Temür was assassinated by Mongol antagonists, providing the emperor with an opportunity to impose his own candidate. Overcoming the resistance of Toghto's own paternal grandmother, the emperor placed the young man on the throne, without making allowances for the vastly different skills he would need to rule a disparate group of oasis dwellers as opposed to the subjects of a great

64 *MS*, 332, p. 8609.

65 *TMHT*, 107, p. 1607.

sedentary civilization. As it turned out, Toghto was unable to acclimate himself to the new environment and instead alienated the local peoples by his alcoholism and his evident unconcern for governance. He sent tribute to the Ming court but did not fulfill his other responsibilities as a ruler. The transition from being a hanger-on at the Ming court and capital to being a decision-maker on the frontiers was simply too much for Toghto, who apparently collapsed from the strain. Relations between the Ming court and the inhabitants of Hami who increasingly resented the Yung-lo emperor's intrusion into their domestic affairs also became strained. Toghto's death in 1411 ended the potential for hostilities.⁶⁶

The new ruler, who was selected by his own people, actually stabilized relations with the Ming and served China's interests better than Toghto. Sixteen official tribute missions, not including unofficial embassies dispatched by private individuals, as well as commercial caravans to the Chinese border markets, from Hami, reached China during the next fourteen years. Hami's ruler also provided intelligence about conditions in Central Asia and permitted tribute envoys from more distant areas to travel to China.⁶⁷ The Yung-lo emperor responded not only by offering elaborate gifts to the ruler and his relatives, but also by dissuading the Oyrat Mongols from attacking Hami. The resulting tributary relationship supplied China with horses, sheep, camels, sal ammoniac, and jade, while Hami's rulers received paper money, which had to be spent within China, and silk, both of which the Ming possessed in abundance. This arrangement was equitable and was not a financial drain on the Ming court, as it would be later in the dynasty.

The Yung-lo emperor's policies toward the Timurids, however, were not initially successful. He dispatched another embassy to demand the release of the envoys earlier detained by Temür, but was woefully ignorant of the Central Asian ruler's power. Temür, motivated in part by what he believed to be insulting treatment by the Ming court and in part by his desire to Islamize China, was also eager to gain control of China's resources through a military expedition. After meticulous preparations, he set forth in 1404 with 200,000 men for an invasion of the Middle Kingdom. The Ming court scarcely took any precautions to counter the campaign of the greatest conqueror in the world, but, fortunately for the Chinese, Temür died on 18 February, 1405.

Fortunately, too, for the Chinese, Temür's son and successor Shahrukh Bahadur was eager for harmonious relations with the Ming. Trade and tribute missions were exchanged between the two courts, as hostilities diminished

66 For more on this, see Ch'en Kao-hua, *Ming tai Ha-mi T'u-lu-fan tzu liao hui pien* (Urumchi, 1984), pp. 39–44.

67 *TMHT*, 107, p. 1607.

considerably. The Yung-lo emperor reciprocated by sending the envoy Ch'en Ch'eng with gifts for Shahrukh in Herat and for his son Ulugh Beg who was based in Samarkand. Ch'en returned with a diary, the *Hsi-yü hsing-ch'eng chih*, and an account of the towns and states he visited en route, the *Hsi-yü fan-kuo chih*.⁶⁸ The Yung-lo emperor also ingratiated himself with Shahrukh by writing a letter in which he addressed the Central Asian ruler as an equal. Swayed by the emperor's letter, Shahrukh assembled an embassy, which included the painter Ghiyasu'd-Din Naqqah, to go to Peking to establish regular economic relations and to deliver a beautiful white horse and other gifts to the emperor. The envoys bowed their heads but would not kowtow when brought to an imperial audience at court. Yet, the Yung-lo emperor was so eager for good relations that he ignored what would normally be labeled offensive behavior. He allowed the envoys to accompany him both at court and on a hunt, and Ghiyasu'd-Din Naqqah took advantage of this imperial favor to write a splendid account of the embassy's reception in China, which offers later historians an invaluable glimpse of the Ming court.⁶⁹

The result of these exchanges was a steady flow of trade and tribute embassies. Twenty missions from the Timurid lands reached China from 1407 to 1424. The Timurid envoys and merchants offered horses, sheep, camels, jade, and sal ammoniac and received, in return, paper money, robes, and silk.⁷⁰ Both sides apparently profited from this arrangement. Similarly, the Yung-lo emperor encouraged other towns and oases in Central Asia to effect a suitable relationship. Khotan, for example, began to send its excellent quality of jade, and Turfan and Kashgar dispatched horses and sheep.

The death of the Yung-lo emperor in 1424 signalled a gradual change in Ming–Central Asian relations. His military expeditions to Mongolia and Vietnam had been disastrous failures; as the fifteenth century wore on, the Ming army began to decline; and the navy suffered a setback when the Cheng Ho expeditions were halted after 1432. China's evident military weakness prompted foreigners including the Central Asians to advance their own economic interests. Their envoys refused to accept paper money and instead demanded valuable goods such as porcelain, silk and satin, and clothing; they requested higher prices for the products they imported; and they arrived in China with larger entourages, increasing court expenditures considerably. Smuggling flourished, and the court began for the first time to exhibit an anti-foreign streak.

68 On Ch'en, see Rossabi, "Two Ming envoys," pp. 1–34, and Felicia Hecken, "A fifteenth-century Chinese diplomat in Herat," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd Ser., 3:1 (April, 1993), pp. 85–98.

69 The account is translated in Maitra, *A Persian embassy*.

70 Ch'en Hsün, *Huan-Yü t'ung chih* in *Hsüan lan t'ang ts'ung shu hsü-chi* (1456; rpt. Nanking, 1947), 117, p. 8b offers a list of these products.

Hami's relations with the Ming were bedeviled by these same problems. The court was perturbed when five missions from Hami reached China in 1432, seven in 1433, and five in 1437. Ming officials were also upset in 1440 when Toghto Bukha, the leader of an embassy from Hami, demanded vast quantities of tea, gauze, and silk. They responded in the same year by limiting Hami to one mission a year. This effort to impose restrictions was frustrated by Esen's invasions of Hami in 1444 and 1446. The Oyirad ruler's control over Hami led to an increase in tribute missions and the number of men on each, and to numerous Ming complaints about the poor quality of goods brought by the emissaries. Even after Esen's defeat and death, similar economic and diplomatic problems continued to arise and plague relations between Hami and China. Illicit trade flourished, and the Ming court persisted in deploring the excessive number of embassies from Hami and the unsatisfactory and occasionally defective products imported from the same town, as well as the growing political estrangement of its leaders.

Following the Yung-lo emperor's death, China also had fewer contacts with the more distant towns and states of Central Asia. After 1424, for example, the *Ming shih* does not record any embassies from Khotan and Khara Khoja, which had sent several missions during the Yung-lo reign. The Timurid center of Samarkand maintained a steady flow of embassies for about fifteen years after the Yung-lo emperor's death. Curtailment of these missions was provoked both by internal insurrections and by misunderstandings and complaints. Temür's grandson, Ulugh Beg, was repeatedly plagued by violent outbreaks, culminating in a coup d'état in 1449, which led to his assassination.⁷¹ This turbulence no doubt hindered the dispatch of embassies to foreign lands. Simultaneously, Ming officials charged that the Chinese gifts to embassies from Samarkand were costly and urged the emperors to reject tribute items of inferior craftsmanship. The resulting unpleasant incidents ultimately led to the termination of tribute embassies and official relations.

In the last third of the fifteenth century, relations between the Ming and Hami worsened. In the late 1460s, the Minister of Rites bitterly pointed out that the last mission from Hami consisted of 360 men but only brought twenty horses, some of which were emaciated, or otherwise unsuited for cavalry service. For the Ming, this was a poor ratio since the court was compelled to supply food and lodging for this large entourage. He proposed, and the court agreed, that Hami be limited to one mission per year⁷² and

71 On Ulugh Beg, see V. V. Barthold, *Four studies on the history of Central Asia II*, tr. T. and V. Minorsky (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958–62).

72 *MSL, Hsien-tsung shih lu*, 21, p. 4b.

that Chinese officials inspect tribute horses before accepting the steeds. Hami repeatedly bridled at these Chinese rules and several missions evaded the regulations. Such economic conflicts inevitably created greater estrangement between Hami and the Ming court.

The rise of the Moghul state of Turfan exacerbated these difficulties. The Moghuls, Muslim descendants of Chinggis Khan's Mongols, had overwhelmed the native Uighur populations of Turfan and sought increased influence throughout the neighboring towns and oases. In 1473, their ruler, Yunus Khan (or A-li, in the Chinese sources), invaded Hami and forced its Uighur ruler, Han Shen, to flee to China. Following this victory, he made demands for exorbitant gifts from the emperor.⁷³ An indication of the court's military decline was its lack of effort to mount a campaign to liberate Hami. In 1482, Han-shen himself, capitalizing on internal disturbances in Turfan, recaptured Hami.⁷⁴ This disruption in diplomatic relations inevitably meant that horses and other goods that China coveted would not reach the court. The conflict between Hami and Turfan also deterred other, more distant states and oases from dispatching tribute embassies. Samarkand was one of the few that continued to send tribute, but its offerings of lions did not please court officials who were concerned about the expensive upkeep and the uselessness of these beasts.⁷⁵

The struggle between Hami and Turfan did not end with Han Shen's triumphant reentry into Hami. Control over Hami offered Turfan a commanding position in routes between China and Central Asia, and its new ruler, Ahmad, was eager to secure such hegemony. In 1488, pretending that he was proposing a marital alliance with Han Shen, Ahmad, accompanied by some of his troops, was permitted to enter Hami where he immediately assassinated the overly gullible Uighur ruler.⁷⁶ He quickly occupied Hami and rejected China's demand that he withdraw and return the town's seal. In 1492, however, he appeared to abandon the occupation. Yet when a Chinese-supported candidate for rule arrived in the following year, Ahmad had him kidnapped. In 1495, with prompting from activist ministers such as Ma Wen-sheng, the court mounted an expedition which expelled the forces of Turfan. Even more successful was the policy of cutting off trade and tribute from Turfan, which resulted in the return of the kidnapped ruler of Hami in

73 MSL, *Hsien-tsung shih-lu*, 115, pp. 1b–2a. 74 MSL, *Hsien-tsung shih-lu*, 227, p. 8b.

75 MSL, *Hsien-tsung shih-lu*, 245, p. 4a–b. See Lam Yuan-chu, "Memoir on the campaign against Turfan," *Journal of Asian History*, 24, No. 2 (1990), pp. 105–60, for additional details on Ming relations with Turfan.

76 Fu Wei-lin, *Ming shu in Kuo hs eb chi pen ts'ung shu* (Early K'ang-hsi period; rpt. Shanghai, 1928), 167, pp. 3294–95.

1497.⁷⁷ But Turfan did not abandon its efforts to gain undisputed control over Hami, and in 1513 its ruler Mansūr seized the town.

China's inability to resist Mansūr was still another indication of its growing military weakness. Moreover, by that time, the Chinese ministers associated with an aggressive policy had departed from the scene. Lacking control over Hami, China could not regulate trade and tribute as readily. Numerous embassies now evaded the Ming's regulations on trade and tribute, and expenses for supplying and entertaining these missions soared. Smuggling flourished, and the court's ability to regulate prices on goods it sought to monopolize diminished considerably. As a result, there was an increase in the number of court officials calling for limitations on the tribute missions from Central Asia. A few ministers had written memorials advocating such restrictions as early as the Yung-lo reign, but the weakening political and commercial positions of the Ming prompted a significant rise in such missives to the emperor. Absorbed with internal problems as well as with potent military threats from the Mongols and later from the Manchus, the court could not prevent the flouting of its regulations for Central Asian embassies and trade. In the late sixteenth century, merchants from Turfan, for example, dispatched innumerable "embassies" and falsely portrayed them as official missions when they were simply trading caravans. The Ming acquiesced and permitted them to enter China though officials were aware of the duplicity.

Many Chinese were also well aware of, and knowledgeable about, the peoples of Central Asia. Personnel in the College of Interpreters and the College of Translators had personal contacts with envoys and merchants from the so-called Western Regions and thus had access to information about Central Asia. Similarly, Chinese merchants and eunuchs often dealt with the traders and officials of Hami, Turfan, and other towns and states to the northwest, with the eunuchs often greeting the Central Asians on the border and escorting them to the capital. The court also tried to develop a corps of experts on Central Asia. Yang I-ch'ing, an advocate of changes in the defense of the northwestern borderland in the early sixteenth century, had been stationed in Shensi for eight years before court officials sought his advice and recommendations about the conflict between Hami and Turfan. Ma Wen-sheng had also served for eight years in Shensi before he was granted an opportunity to make policy as Vice Minister of the Right in the Ministry of War. His knowledge of conditions in the northwest is revealed in his brief history and treatise entitled *Hsing-fu Ha-mi chi*.⁷⁸ In short, the traditional interpretation

⁷⁷ MSL, *Hsiao tsung shih lu*, 131, pp. 1b-3a.

⁷⁸ On Ma and Yang, see DMB, Vol. 2, pp. 1027-29, 1516-19.

that Ming China lacked expertise and was ignorant of events in Central Asia requires modification.

Similarly, the contention that the Ming received rare and useless goods from its northwestern neighbors needs to be re-examined. Moreover, the Chinese goods granted to the Central Asians either as gifts or in trade did not, at least through the fifteenth century, impose a severe burden on the Ming economy. The gifts to rulers and envoys consisted of paper money, silks, robes, boots, hats and other items of clothing, products of which the court had a surplus. Only when missions with large entourages, each member of which requested and received gifts, began to arrive in the late fifteenth century did the court's expenses soar. The so-called gifts in reply, presents provided by the court in return for tribute offerings, were also not exorbitant, and the Chinese often determined the exchange values. The *Ta Ming hui tien* offers the following rates for horses from Hami:

1. Each average horse – one bolt of fine silk, eight of coarse silk, and the value in paper money of two bolts of coarse silk.
2. Each inferior horse – one bolt of fine silk, seven of coarse silk, and the value in paper money of one bolt of coarse silk.
3. Each newborn colt and each horse which died en route – three bolts of coarse silk.
4. Each Western horse – five lined garments of colored satin.⁷⁹

The same text also provided exchange values for camels, jade, lapis lazuli, steel knives, and animal pelts offered by tribute bearers from Hami. Since the Chinese controlled this ratio, they ensured that it was not an intolerable financial burden.

In addition to the tribute exchanges, there were actual commercial relations. The court also regulated this trade, which meant that it could, in theory, avert disastrous, unfavorable balances for China. The court mandated that trade be conducted for three to five days in or near the building housing the College of Interpreters, and it prohibited commerce in weapons, iron implements, knives, scissors, and gauze with dragon, phoenix, or flowered designs. The Chinese merchants traded for horses, jade, and animal pelts, all of which were valuable and not the rare and useless goods of which officials complained.⁸⁰ In turn, envoys and merchants from Hami were permitted to pur-

79 *TMHT*, 112, p. 1653. "Western horses" were probably those from more distant regions in Central Asia.

80 They also obtained sheep, falcons, sal ammoniac, gold and silver vessels, diamonds, Muslim blue (used for blue and white porcelains), agate, yellow ochre, and grapes. For this, see Rossabi, "Ming China's relations with Hami," pp. 262–87.

chase silks, porcelains, rugs and small quantities of tea. This controlled system of private trade was apparently beneficial in the fifteenth century, but as the dynasty declined merchants circumvented the court's prohibitions on private commerce. Illicit trade flourished, and contraband items were traded with relative impunity. The stringent regulations devised by the court were evaded. Repeated memorials to the throne and imperial edicts had little effect as evidenced by the continuous stream of injunctions and imperial admonitions throughout the sixteenth century. As one student of the Ming economy has written, "international trade was officially outlawed, but, in fact, it was carried out with the connivance of local authorities."⁸¹ Though such commerce undoubtedly benefited individual merchants and officials, the court's position on foreign trade was eroded.

The tea-horse trade yields additional evidence of the court's initial successes and eventual failures. Horses were essential for China's defense but the Ming had neither the horse breeding experts nor the pasture land available to rear sufficient steeds. Even the meager acreage allotted to horse breeding and raising was constantly infringed upon by the peasants. In 1409, Shensi had twenty-four pasture regions, but by the end of the fifteenth century only six remained. The court created a Pasturage Office (*yüan-ma ssu*) and a Court of the Imperial Stud (*T'ai-p'u ssu*) to manage the pasture areas and to inspect the horses. Yet, there were repeated complaints about the inadequacy of the personnel in both agencies. The Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, commented that "the Chinese know little about the taming or training of horses . . . They have countless horses in the service of the army, but these are so degenerate . . . that they are put to rout even by the neighing of the Tartars' steeds."⁸²

To obtain the horses that it required from the northwestern borderlands and from Tibet, the court turned to the tea-horse trade. A Horse Trading Office (*Ch'a-ma ssu*), which had first been organized in the Sung, was reestablished, under the assumption that the foreign demand for tea (because tea remained fresh longer than other beverages, was freer of impurities than cold water, and acted as a mild stimulant after prolonged exposure to the cold) could be useful for the court. Government control of tea would provide leverage in dealings with the Central Asians because they would then be dependent on the court for supplies of the beverage. Therefore, the court established a monopoly on tea, imposing a 10 percent tax in kind and purchasing nearly all the rest. It ordered its soldiers in Szechwan to transport the tea grown in the plantations of that province to the branches of the Horse Trad-

81 Ray Huang, "Fiscal administration during the Ming dynasty." In *Chinese government in Ming times: Seven studies*, ed. Charles O. Hucker (New York, 1969), p. 110.

82 Matthew Ricci, *China in the sixteenth century: The journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583-1610*, trans. Louis Gallagher (New York, 1953), p. 13.

ing Office in Shensi. Private international commerce in tea was prohibited, and smugglers received harsh sentences, even including capital punishment. The branches of the Horse Trading Office, based in Ho-chou, T'ao-chou, Hsi-ning, and Kan-chou, were staffed by ill-paid and low-ranking officials, an anomaly in light of their vital roles. The court was still afflicted with the view that commerce was demeaning and that officials supervising trade ought not to be accorded high status. Though the court recognized the need for trade, it remained scornful.⁸³

The Chinese court sought total control of this trade. Border officials gave the top half of gold tablets (*chin-p'ai hsin-fu*) to those foreigners granted commercial privileges. These tablets permitted them to arrive once every three years to trade horses for Chinese tea. The court determined the price of horses as follows:

Superior horse (*shang*): 120 *chin* of tea

Average horse (*chung*): 70 *chin* of tea

Inferior horse (*hsia*) 50 *chin* of tea

But the Horse Trading Office could only maintain these prices if it successfully curbed the private export of tea. The court counted on receiving approximately 14,000 horses a year, a not inconsiderable number. During the late Hung-wu and the Yung-lo reigns, the Chinese readily obtained the horses they required from Central Asia, which turned out to be invaluable for the Yung-lo emperor's five Mongol campaigns and his other expansionist efforts since he was clearly denied Mongol horses during that time.

Esen's raids and the resulting Chinese foreign policy inflicted severe damage to the tea-horse trade. His occupation of the northwestern borderlands in the mid-1440s interfered with the Ming's efforts to control this commerce. The gold tablets, vital elements in the tea-horse trade, were scattered, and almost all were lost. Without such identification, the government could not determine which foreigners could legitimately trade with the Chinese and encountered difficulties in preventing unscrupulous Chinese officials and merchants from trading with the Central Asians. Transportation of tea from Szechwan to Shensi was also disrupted, as the army was needed to counter Esen's invasions. Ironically, Esen's incursions showed the need for horses while simultaneously impeding their acquisition by the Chinese. Tea smuggling increased, and the government appeared powerless to maintain its commercial system.

The court used a variety of techniques to regain control over the tea-horse trade. The Ch'eng-hua emperor (1465-87) dispatched Tea Censors to patrol

83 This section on the tea-horse trade is based upon Rossabi, "Tea and horse trade with Inner Asia."

the borders to prevent illicit trade. He also ordered that idle land in Shensi be planted with tea, so that the transport of the plant would not be burdensome on the military. Tea production increased in Shensi, and the court did not need to rely on the deteriorating army. Yet, these efforts did not revive the official trade. The government received only a paltry number of horses because the Central Asians could obtain tea more cheaply from private merchants.

The last decade of the fifteenth century witnessed even more difficulties for this border commerce. When Turfan began to challenge the Ming, conditions in the northwest became more unstable, impeding court efforts to invigorate the tea-horse trade. As critical to the tea-horse trade as was the Turfan challenge, Shensi endured droughts and famines in the 1490s which led to a court response that contributed to further erosion. To provide relief for the people of Shensi, the court used the *k'ai-chung* (middleman) system by which it provided substantial quantities of tea for merchants who were willing to transport grain to the beleaguered province. Such grants of tea not only reduced the amount available to the court for trade but also offered additional competition, as some merchants used their newly secured gains of tea to trade illegally with the Central Asians.

In 1505, Yang I-ch'ing, the Left Vice Censor-in-chief (*Tso-fu-tu yü-shih*) in charge of the horse administration in Shensi, wrote a memorial in which he proposed a plan to save the tea-horse trade. He advocated the reinstitution of the gold tablet system and serious scrutiny by border officials of these licenses to eliminate forgeries. He also advised the emperor to increase the number of Tea Censors in order to eradicate the "evil grass" – Yang's description for corrupt border officials – that threatened the government's trade. Under his plan, stiff punishments, including execution, would be meted out to tea smugglers and officials who collaborated with them. In effect, Yang envisioned a return to the system that existed under the first emperors, a system supervised and controlled by the Chinese government. Yet, transport of tea to the borderlands remained a problem, and Yang was compelled to seek an accommodation with the merchants. He proposed that merchants buy tea in Shensi and convey it to the branches of the Horse Trading Office where they would be paid in silver for their services. His plan ensured that the government would still be the only agency legally empowered to engage in the tea-horse trade. But the merchants did not abide by his plan and, in part, sabotaged the reinvigoration of the official trade. Since they secured more profits by selling the tea directly to the Central Asians rather than to the Ming government, they simply transported it across the border. The court, diverted by other domestic and foreign problems, was unable, in the sixteenth century, to prevent this smuggling. The fall of Hami in 1513, as

well as the Ming's turbulent relations with the Mongols shortly thereafter, further undermined the tea-horse trade until it virtually disappeared in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

FROM JURCHENS TO MANCHUS

Ironically, the northeastern borderlands of China were initially the least threatening of the regions to the north, yet, ultimately, the peoples in the region caused the downfall of the Ming dynasty.⁸⁴ The principal group in the area was the Jurchens, a people whose ancestors had conquered North China and had founded the Chin dynasty (1115–1234). Defeated by the Mongols in 1234, some Jurchens settled in China, but those who retained their unique ethnic identity either had always remained in their homeland or moved back from the center of the Middle Kingdom. By the early Ming, Jurchens had developed at least three different economies. The most northerly, who resided in the Amur and Ussuri valleys, were primarily hunters and fishermen and lived a style so different from the Chinese that the Ming referred to them as the “wild Jurchens.” Those to the west were pastoralists and practiced the Mongol style of life. Finally, those to the south, in Chien-chou and Mao-lien, lived in a society similar to the Chinese, often practiced sedentary agriculture, and would eventually be of greatest concern to the Ming.

These territories had been under Mongol control during the Yüan, but the Hung-wu emperor's ouster of the last Yüan ruler opened up new possibilities and new dangers for the Jurchens. For the first several decades after the establishment of the Ming, Mongol detachments still roamed through the Jurchen lands, and a pro-Mongol group still ruled across the border in Korea (Koryö). Naghachu, the Mongol governor of Liao-yang since 1362, sought to expand from his base in the southern reaches of the Jurchen lands, while Koryö tried to gain control over the territories in Liao-tung inhabited by Koreans. Koryö was concerned about potential challenges to its authority from Koreans residing outside its borders.

The Hung-wu emperor's initial target, however, was Naghachu. From his base in Chin-shan, seventy miles north of Shen-yang, Naghachu raided the newly-established Ming guards in Liao-tung, and, on one occasion, his forces killed over 5,000 soldiers. The Hung-wu emperor, diverted by the attempt to pacify the remnants of the loyal supporters of the Yüan, could not devote much effort to the northeast for a time. Yet, his succession of victories over the Yüan forces prompted some of Naghachu's supporters to defect in the

84 Much of this section is based on Rossabi, *The Jurchens in the Yuan and Ming*. The reader is referred to that work for a more extensive citation of sources.

late 1370s and early 1380s, and he then adopted a more aggressive policy, which included integrating the defectors in chieftaincies established in Liao-tung and challenging Naghachu's troops in the north and east. In 1387, the emperor dispatched Feng Sheng with a 200,000-man army to defeat Naghachu. Eager to avert a military confrontation, Feng sent a subordinate to offer lenient terms if Naghachu submitted. Intimidated by the large Ming force, Naghachu surrendered, and the Chinese abided by their pledge of leniency. The emperor granted Naghachu the title of Marquis of Hai-hsi, bestowed titles also on his lieutenants, and awarded them gifts commensurate with their new positions. He incorporated some of Naghachu's troops into the Ming army, which ironically enough had only recently been its enemy. The court did not punish, imprison, or execute most of these erstwhile former adversaries. This court policy doubtless impressed other unpacified Mongols and Jurchens and eventually facilitated Ming efforts to achieve peace on the northeastern border.

The Koreans were also determined to protect their interests in the Jurchen lands. The Koryŏ court was at first fearful of the Ming gains in Liao-tung and was, in any case, supportive of the Mongols. In 1388, the King of Koryŏ organized an expedition to expel Ming forces from Liao-tung, but a native group of commanders, led by Yi Sŏng-gye, who despised the Mongols and their humiliating hold over Korea, turned against and overthrew the pro-Yüan monarch. By 1392, the Yi dynasty had replaced Koryŏ, and the new court policy focused on active pacification of the growing number of Jurchens residing on the Korean frontiers. A devastating campaign by the Wild Jurchens had compelled the Left Chien-chou Jurchens to flee southward from the region of the Sungari River to Womuhŏ on the banks of the Tumen River, a base from which they staged raids on Korea. Several threats and sorties by the Korean troops, however, prompted the Left Chien-chou leader Möngke Temür to submit and to present tribute in 1395, and he continued to accept nominal Korean suzerainty for over a decade.⁸⁵ The Chien-chou chieftain Akhachu, who had also moved from northern Manchuria to the Korean frontiers, was similarly coerced into presenting tribute to the Yi rulers. The Chinese court watched with growing anxiety the Koreans' successful dealings with the Jurchens. Its own policies had not been as effective, though the power of Naghachu, the major threat to Ming interests along the northeastern frontiers, had been defused.

The early Ming court could not, and did not, aspire to the control imposed upon the Jurchens by the Mongols, yet it created a norm of organization

85 Oshibuchi Hajime, "Kenshū saei no setsuritsu nendai ni tsuite," *Rekishi to shiri*, 26, No. 6 (1930), pp. 465–66.

that would ultimately serve as the principal vehicle for relations with peoples along the northeastern frontiers. It was unable to levy taxes on the Jurchens, as the Mongols had done. Also, unlike the Mongols, the early Ming Chinese had not set up postal stations in Liao-tung and northern Manchuria to facilitate the transmission of official mail and also to impose greater control over the region: an indication that they had not gained the same authority as the Yüan. Despite its less advantageous position, however, the Ming established an institution that formalized its relations and eventually provided leverage in dealings with the Jurchens. The court founded guards (*wei*) in Liao-tung during the Hung-wu reign and in Manchuria later in the Yung-lo reign. Yet, the establishment of these guards did not signify Ming rule. The Jurchen leaders were not truly incorporated into the Ming empire, for they collected taxes and raised armies for themselves, not for the court. Nor did the creation of the Ming guards indicate that the Jurchen leaders were moving toward a more sinicized society. The guards were simply convenient vehicles for the Ming's reaffirmation of traditional Chinese foreign relations. They offered the comforting yet misleading view that the Jurchens accepted the Chinese world order, recognized their positions as "vassals" of the Ming court, and perceived of Chinese civilization as superior. With such an "understanding," the court could approve commercial and so-called tributary relations with the Jurchens.

It remains to explain why the Jurchens accepted a status which was inaccurately described as "vassals" or subordinates but which still, at least ceremonially and ritually, treated them in a demeaning way. One consideration was the use of Ming approbation as a means of legitimation. Jurchen leaders could capitalize on the glory and prestige of the Chinese empire to bolster their own positions among their people.⁸⁶ Another explanation is that they might be able to rely on Chinese assistance against Koreans and other enemies. Such hopes for Chinese aid might be illusory, but, on occasion, the threat of invoking Chinese military help might deter potential adversaries. But "however valuable these explanations, it seems likely that the paramount consideration was economic. The Jurchens desired the gifts granted to each tribute-bearing mission and coveted the Chinese goods that were available in trade. They acceded to the Chinese political system in order to obtain useful, if not essential, products for their communities."⁸⁷

In sum, by the end of the Hung-wu reign, the essentials of a policy toward the Jurchens had taken shape. Most of the inhabitants of Manchuria, except

86 For this point, see Phillip Woodruff, "Status and lineage among the Jurchens of the Korean northeast in the fifteenth century," *Central and Inner Asian Studies*, 1 (1987), p. 122.

87 Rossabi, *The Jurchens*, p. 18.

for the wild Jurchens, were at peace with China. Yet a suitable relationship between the Ming and their neighbors to the northeast had not been established. The guard system had scarcely reached into Manchuria, and the regulations for tribute and commerce were still relatively unformed. Moreover, experts and counselors, either Chinese or Jurchens, were, as yet, unavailable to the Ming court.

The Yung-lo emperor once again was responsible for devising the framework for Ming–Jurchen relations. He refrained from pursuing the same aggressive policy he had pursued with the Mongols. Instead, he relied upon diplomacy to secure the kind of relationship he wanted. He did not wish to initiate hostilities in the northeast while engaged in military campaigns in Mongolia. He sought peace with the Jurchens and tried to prevent them from allying with the Mongols or the Koreans to pose threats to the Chinese borderlands. One way of winning over the Jurchens was to initiate a regular system of tribute and trade, a boon to these northeastern neighbors, as well as to the Ming, which needed and coveted certain Jurchen products. Finally, the emperor distinguished between Liao-tung and the other Jurchen areas farther to the north. Liao-tung was to be part of the normal administrative system of the Ming, with the creation of a Regional Military Commission (*Tu-ssu*) and a commensurate set of military and fiscal obligations which were similar to those imposed upon and generally fulfilled by provinces in the central core of China.

The Yung-lo emperor did not expect that the Regional Military Commissions and guards he founded in the Jurchen territories would fulfill the same functions. He granted their leaders military ranks and titles, but they were under no obligation to serve in Ming campaigns. Nor were they required to pay taxes. They were granted seals and gifts but were certainly not under the jurisdiction of the Ming court. For the most part, the emperor simply confirmed the appointments of the native leaders and had neither the ability, nor the desire, to initiate a divide and rule policy. The Ming did not have the military or political strength to prevent individual guards from becoming too powerful. At the beginning of the dynasty, the guards comprised relatively small populations, which was more a reflection of their economy and their rudimentary administrative systems than of Ming policy. The “using barbarians to check barbarians” (*i-i-chih-i*) policy was not and could not truly be applied.

The emperor focused both on the Jurchens of the south as well as those in the northeast, though he was clearly more successful in dealing with the pastoral and agricultural peoples residing closer to China than with the hunting and fishing Wild Jurchens. He dispatched at least eleven embassies within two years of his accession to persuade the Jurchens to initiate proper relations

with China.⁸⁸ There seems little doubt that China during the Yung-lo reign was pursuing an activist policy with the Jurchens as well as with many of the Inner Asian peoples. The view that Ming China was xenophobic and sought restrictions on foreign relations does not apply to the Yung-lo era.

The court's initial overtures were directed at the Chien-chou Jurchens, the group with whom the emperor had the closest connections. Both the Chinese and the Korean sources claim that the daughter of Akhachu, the leader of the Chien-chou, was in the Yung-lo emperor's harem. It was only natural, therefore, that the emperor would send his first embassy to the Chien-chou, and it is not surprising that, in December of 1403, Akhachu accepted the establishment of a guard in his region. Though the Chien-chou Jurchen often moved during the Yung-lo reign, they continued to maintain tributary and diplomatic relations with the Ming. The court responded by investing two of Akhachu's sons as commissioners in two of the 179 Guards created in these lands in the Yung-lo era. Möngke Bukha became the leader in Mao-lien, and the son granted the Chinese name Li Hsien-chung was eventually granted jurisdiction over Chien-chou. The court also founded guards among the Hai-hsi Jurchens who inhabited the regions around the confluence of the Sungari and A-shih rivers near the modern town of Harbin. This relationship was even more remarkable because the Hai-hsi led a less sedentary lifestyle and were more geographically distant from China than Chien-chou.

The Left Chien-chou Jurchens were initially more intransigent to Ming entreaties. Their leader Möngke Temür had allied himself with and earlier accepted the jurisdiction of Yi Söng-hye, and, in 1404, had been invited to the Korean capital, where the King conferred upon him a title in the royal bodyguard and made him a myriarch of Kyöngsöng. He appeared to be a loyal subject of the Koreans. Yet, the Yung-lo emperor did not concede and persisted in his efforts to persuade the Jurchen chieftain to submit. Möngke Temür at first rejected his overtures and received strong Korean support for his resistance to the Ming, which compounded its difficulties by offending Möngke in not using his proper title. Finally, in 1405, the Ming envoy Wang Chiao-hua-ti, addressing Möngke with fitting deference, convinced the Jurchen leader to throw in his lot with the Chinese. Möngke did not reveal to his Korean patrons his change of allegiance until he started his journey to the Ming court. The emperor rewarded him with titles and gifts and confirmed him as the commissioner of the newly established Left Chien-chou guard. The Korean court, infuriated by his duplicity and by his betrayal of their purported alliance, retaliated by revoking the commercial privileges of

88 *Mindai Man-Mōshiryō: Rishōjitsurokushō* (Tokyo, 1954–58), Vol. 1, pp. 139, 145–46, 151–52, 155, 157–60, 164–65, 170.

the Left Chien-chou, denying them salt, horses, oxen, and iron.⁸⁹ Hostilities erupted between his forces and the Koreans, compelling him in 1411 to move from Korea's northeastern borderlands to Feng-chou, a site closer to China. By the end of the Yung-lo reign, Möngke Temür sought to maintain a precarious balance in allegiance to China and to Korea. He profited more from trade with China but was still fearful of Korean armed attacks.

The Korean court was concerned about what it perceived to be Chinese encroachment on territories vital to its security. With foreigners loyal to the Ming all along their northeastern frontiers, the Koreans were naturally anxious lest, like their Koryō predecessors, they fall victim to still another conquest. The Ming had lured Jurchens who had earlier served the Korean court and persuaded them to transfer their allegiance. In a letter to the Ming court, the Koreans asserted that they had a legitimate claim to the Jurchen territories, pointing out also that two tombs of Yi rulers were located in the region. They tried desperately, but unsuccessfully to retain the loyalty of Möngke Temür, but the emperor, noting that Möngke was a blood relative of his empress, overrode Korean objections to the Jurchen leader's new political orientation. He accepted, however, some of the Koreans' territorial claims, which stretched back to the Liao and Chin periods, though he did not abandon the area where the two tombs were located, forcing the Koreans to move the tombs. Yet the Chinese-Korean competition over an allegiance from the Jurchens persisted for much of the Ming dynasty.

By 1410, the Yung-lo emperor had created a series of guards and had superseded Korean influence among the Jurchens. He had achieved peace in the Jurchen lands adjacent to the Tumen, Amur, Sungari, and Ussuri rivers, and the Chinese government had developed expertise about the different Jurchen groups and leaders. Such knowledge facilitated efforts to rank the Jurchen tribes and reward them on the basis of this ranking. It should be stressed once again that the creation of a guard did not imply political control.

Even less political control was implied by the establishment of a Regional Military Commission among the Wild Jurchens of Nurgan. In 1403, the Yung-lo emperor had dispatched an envoy to seek the submission of the Wild Jurchens, but the response was disappointing. A couple of Wild Jurchen groups arrived at court with gifts of gerfalcons, but no effective relationship was maintained. In 1409, the emperor ordered Ishiha, a eunuch of Hai-hsi Jurchen derivation, to lead an expedition to the mouth of the Amur to pacify the Wild Jurchens. Two years elapsed before Ishiha set forth with 1,000 men and twenty-five ships toward the north. The reception he was accorded by Jurchen chiefs was cordial, and he responded by providing

89 Harada Takashi, "Mindai Joshinjin no tekki ni tsuite," *Tōbō gakubō*, 11, No. 1 (1940), pp. 261–62.

them with gifts. They, in turn, agreed to the Ming creation of a Regional Military Commission and to the dispatch of a tribute mission to accompany Ishiha back to the court. In 1413, the emperor again sent Ishiha to Nurgan to meet with the Jurchen chiefs and to build the Yung-ning temple in an attempt to promote Buddhism among the least sedentarized of the Jurchens.⁹⁰ He fashioned a stele that described the expedition in Chinese, Jurchen, and Mongol. His efforts were well-received because he was well-informed about Jurchen customs and attitudes.⁹¹ He and the emperor convinced the Jurchens to permit the establishment of postal stations in Nurgan, which would not only promote the conveyance of official mail, but also the travels of merchants who could count on lodging and supplies at the stations.

Ishiha's activities and the emperor's policies led to the fulfillment of some of their objectives but did not translate into governance of the region. Tribute and trade from Nurgan began to flow into China; the Jurchen chiefs accepted the bestowal of titles by the Ming; Buddhism was promoted among the native peoples; and commerce and communications were facilitated through the postal stations. Yet, the Ming court did not dominate the political fortunes of the Wild Jurchens. It simply maintained a presence in the far northeast of Manchuria. After the Yung-lo emperor's death, it became increasingly difficult to do so. In 1426 and 1432, the Hsüan-te emperor dispatched Ishiha to lead expeditions by boat to the Wild Jurchen lands. On the first trip, he was ordered to construct shipyards and warehouses to supply the Chinese troops and officials who might be stationed in the Nurgan Regional Military Commission. On the second trip, he presented a seal to a new ruler and offered presents to other Jurchens who had cooperated with the Ming. He also repaired the Yung-ning temple which had been severely damaged a few years earlier. Yet, the expeditions were terminated shortly thereafter. The 1432 mission was the last to be officially dispatched by the Ming. Court officials deemed the expeditions to be too expensive, and they also abandoned the warehouses and shipyards because of the costs and Jurchen opposition. By the fourth decade of the fifteenth century, therefore, the court had lost its admittedly precarious base among the Wild Jurchens.

The Ming, however, had succeeded somewhat in promoting sinicization among the Chien-chou and Mao-lien Jurchens. In 1417, the court founded a Prefectural Buddhist Registry in Chien-chou, indicating that at least a small group of Jurchens was attracted by Buddhism. It encouraged nonbelligerent Jurchens to settle within, or adjacent to, the Chinese border and created the

90 Yang Yang, et al., *Ming tai Nu erh kan tu ssu chi ch' i wei so yen chiu* (Cheng-chou, 1982), pp. 52–67.

91 For more on Ishiha, see Rossabi, "Two Ming envoys to Inner Asia."

communities of An-lo and Tzu-tsai for such migrants.⁹² To assist these migrants and to urge them to settle down, the Ming provided them with robes, grain, paper money, and materials for the building of houses. As they became increasingly sinicized, they began to perform useful services for the court. They not only offered tribute to the emperor and traded with Chinese merchants but also worked as interpreters, translators, intelligence gatherers, and escorts for embassies. Some joined the Embroidered-Uniform Guard (*chin-i wei*), the bodyguards for the emperors. Their knowledge of Jurchen language, customs, and politics proved invaluable for the Ming, and they were well rewarded for their expertise by the court.

Simultaneously, Chinese crossed into Jurchen lands, offering a living introduction to Chinese civilization. Some were merchants who traded illegally with the Jurchens; others were peasants and soldiers stationed along the frontiers who resented the military and fiscal exactions of the court; and still others were descendants of prisoners of war captured in the early Ming–Jurchen hostilities.

There is no doubt that the Chinese expatriates contributed enormously to Jurchen development. They guided and encouraged the Jurchens, particularly the Hai-hsi and the Chien-chou, to become farmers and taught their proteges the uses of agricultural tools and techniques. They served as craftsmen and trained skilled artisans among the Jurchens. They advised the ‘barbarians’ on military technology and iron production.⁹³

The various Chinese who worked with the Jurchens in an official capacity also influenced and eventually precipitated changes in the culture of the north-eastern peoples which would have dramatic ramifications on China itself. Eunuchs, for example, who, on the one hand, often served as envoys to the Jurchens or who, on the other hand, were the first to greet Jurchen visitors to China were, on occasion, non-Chinese and served as models for sinicization. Tangible gains appeared to accrue to those who accommodated Chinese civilization. Eunuchs often became confidantes of the emperors and were granted wide-ranging responsibilities.

Similarly, some of the military officials who dealt with the Jurchens on the borders were sinicized non-Chinese and offered still other examples for emulation. Even more significant in producing changes among the Jurchens was the actual creation of guards. Since many of the Jurchen chiefs had originally been weak, their designations as leaders of guards and the attendant gifts, seals, and permissions to trade bolstered their positions. The Ming

92 Ejima Hisao, “Anraku Jizai nishū ni tsuite,” *Shien*, 48 (1951), pp. 71–72.

93 Rossabi, *The Jurchens*, p. 28. For a different interpretation of the Yung-lo court’s policy toward the Jurchens, see G. V. Melikhov, “Politiika mnskoi imperii v otnoshenii Chzhurchzhenei (1402–1413).” In *Kitai i sosedi*, ed. S. L. Tikhvinski (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), pp. 251–74.

imprimatur and support offered them the opportunity to serve as intermediaries between their own people and the Chinese court in diplomatic and commercial relations. Ironically, Ming policies fostered a more and better organized Jurchen society.

Economic relations between the Ming and the Jurchens also promoted social changes among the inhabitants of Manchuria while offering valuable goods for the Chinese. Jurchen tribute missions, which needed to have "letters-patent" (*kao-ch'ih*) or gold tablets (*hsin-fu chin-p'ai*) from the court, followed a prescribed route from K'ai-yüan and Fu-shun through Liao-tung to Shan-hai-kuan and into China. Complaints about forged credentials of entry surfaced, but the problem was not too serious as the government acted only half-heartedly to prevent such abuses during the Yung-lo reign. During their audience with the emperor, the Jurchen envoys received gifts of paper money, colored satin, silk, robes, boots, and stockings based upon their rank and status. Since these presents were readily available and inexpensive to the court, the actual tributary relationship was not a fiscal drain on the Ming as long as the number of envoys was kept within reasonable bounds. Jurchen embassies, in turn, offered horses, which they obtained from the Mongols or Koreans, camels, also probably from the Mongols, and furs as tribute. They also presented more exotic goods such as gerfalcons and hawks, and *a-chiao*, a so-called glue reputed to cure paralysis, asthma, coughing, and a variety of other respiratory and circulatory ailments. In general, however, the court received supplies of at least one of the essential goods from each tribute mission, an indication that it gained from these transactions. The potential for significant drains on Ming finances existed if the number of men on each Jurchen embassy increased, leading to greater demands for presents. Moreover, the Ming offered supplies of grain to relieve Jurchens in the north and east and Chinese residing in Liao-tung in times of distress, another potentially expensive commitment. Yet, the Yung-lo reign witnessed no glaring difficulties or expenses with these policies.

Trade between Jurchen and Chinese merchants and officials appeared to be mutually advantageous. In the capital and in the border markets of K'ai-yüan and Kuang-ning, established in 1406, Jurchens brought horses to be traded for silk and cotton at a specified rate of exchange based upon the quality of the steeds. Court officials selected the horses they wanted, which they sent to the twenty-four pasture areas set up in Liao-tung, then Chinese merchants were permitted to trade for the rest. As long as the court was able to prevent its own merchants from smuggling silk and cotton to the Jurchens, it received the horses it needed. Ginseng was another valuable commodity that the Chinese obtained in trade with the Jurchens. This root, for which the Chinese made elaborate health claims, was highly prized in China and ought not to

be dismissed as a rare and useless luxury good. Commerce, thus, provided valuable goods for the Chinese. On the other hand, the Jurchens received useful, if not essential, Chinese textiles, grains, and such craft and manufactured products as iron vessels. In short, both sides profited from commerce.

The death of the Yung-lo emperor started to unravel the previously stable and beneficial relationship developed with the Jurchens. Within a short time, the expansionist foreign policy associated with his reign began to be rescinded, and, after the 1449 débâcle at T'u-mu, the court became more cautious in its dealings with foreigners. The Koreans sought to capitalize on the more defensive Ming policy so as to play a larger role among the Jurchens.

The triangular relationship between the Yi, the Ming, and the Jurchens, each having different, and occasionally contradictory, interests, provoked conflicts in the period after the Yung-lo emperor's death. One indication of the growing hostility and rivalry was the constant migrations of the Jurchens. Li Man-chu, who had succeeded his father Li Hsien-chung as chief of the Chien-chou, repeatedly sought permission from the court to move into China. The Yi rulers pressured him and his people by attempting to impose taxes and corvée. Li, whose status among his people depended in part upon his ability to demand and extract labor and taxes from them and in part upon Ming confirmation, was concerned by the Korean threat and sought protection from the Chinese court. Perhaps fearful of settling a unified and relatively sizeable group along the frontiers, the Ming rejected his request, compelling Li to move to an area not far removed from Korean territory. Raids and invasions afflicted the Jurchen–Yi relationship until Korean troops routed Li's forces in 1434, causing them to move, and again in 1437, prompting still another move. Embittered by the continued lack of support from the Ming, Li eventually joined with the Oyirad chief Esen in an alliance against the Chinese.

The Left Chien-chou, too, were embroiled in a struggle with the Ming and the Yi. Their leader, Möngke Temür, had earlier alienated the Koreans, so they were not displeased when a rival chief killed him and his son, in 1433. In fact, they established a garrison in Hoeryöng to take advantage of this sudden catastrophe. Now, finding themselves vulnerable without a leader, the Left Chien-chou sought sanctuary in China, but the Ming refused to permit them entry. Left to their own devices, the Left Chien-chou accepted the accession of Möngke Temür's half-brother Fancha who overrode the claims of the dead chief's young son, Tung-shan. Fancha led his people on several migrations in order to evade the attacks of their enemies, including the Koreans. Having finally eluded these enemies, Fancha faced, within a few years, the rivalry of his mature nephew. In 1442, the Ming court prevented full-scale hostilities by mediating their dispute. It recognized Tung-shan as the

chief of the Left Chien-chou guard while creating the position of chief of the Right Chien-chou guard for Fancha. Relations were temporarily smoother, but potential conflicts between the Ming, the Left Chien-chou, the Right Chien-chou, and the Koreans lay beneath the surface and would erupt with the rise of the Oyirad chieftain Esen.

The links among the different Jurchen groups complicated matters for Ming policymakers. Möngke Temür's sister was married to the Chien-chou chief, Li Hsien-chung, and was the mother of Li Man-chu, whose daughter was the wife of Möngke Temür's son, Tung-shan.⁹⁴ Li Man-chu's sister was betrothed to Fancha. These marital relationships provoked both hostility and alliances among the Chien-chou, Left Chien-chou, and Right Chien-chou guards, making it difficult for the Ming to develop policies that could be applied judiciously to all these groups.

Economic relations between the Ming and the Jurchens also deteriorated during this time. The Jurchens sought an increase in trade and tribute, while the Ming now tried to curb contact. They dispatched numerous so-called embassies, which were basically commercial missions; in 1436, fifty such embassies from various Jurchen guards reached China. The number of envoys and their escorts on each mission increased so that a few such embassies had 3,000 to 4,000 men. These numbers led to enormous costs for the Ming in feeding and sheltering them. The amount and quality of tribute goods deteriorated, and the envoys were accused of rudeness, drunkenness, and even of banditry. According to the Chinese accounts, they robbed and injured ordinary Chinese, purchased contraband goods, abused and made inordinate demands on postal station attendants, and offered luxurious and less useful products in trade. In short, the earlier mutually beneficial economic relationship of tribute and trade now became burdensome for the Ming. The court faced sizable expenditures for the Jurchen embassies, gifts, and trade while receiving less valuable commodities and having its regulations and laws ignored. Its own merchants and officials exacerbated these difficulties by taking advantage of the Jurchens on occasion:

The Chinese sources repeatedly cite examples of officials who demanded, and not infrequently received, bribes for permitting emissaries to enter China. They also charge some officials with provoking Jurchen aggression by reducing gifts to the "barbarians" or by raiding the latter's settlements . . . The Chinese texts further acknowledge that some Chinese goods were defective or inferior . . .⁹⁵

The economic relationship envisioned by the Yung-lo emperor apparently did not persist after his death.

⁹⁴ Woodruff, "Status and lineage among the Jurchens," pp. 138–39.

⁹⁵ Rossabi, *The Jurchens*, p. 40.

Esen's raids in 1449 fueled even more acute rifts between the Jurchens and their Chinese and Korean neighbors. Several Jurchen chiefs, including Dongshan and Li Man-chu, betrayed the Ming and repeatedly attacked settlements in Liao-tung, while the Chinese were diverted in resisting the incursions of the Oyirad. The court responded by repairing and constructing a new section of the Great Wall in Liao-tung, by suspending trade at the border markets, by limiting the number of Jurchens who could settle in An-lo, Tzu-tsai, and other sites in China, and by cooperating with the Yi rulers in devising policies toward the Jurchens. The Chien-chou and the Left Chien-chou countered with accusations of Ming and Yi treachery and with raids. By 1467, however, the Chinese and the Koreans gained a temporary respite from their "Jurchen troubles." In 1466, the Ming detained, and then executed, Tung-shan, who had personally led an embassy to complain about Chinese gifts, and, in 1467, a joint Sino-Korean army defeated the Chien-chou and killed Li Man-chu. Ch'en Yüeh, the governor of Liao-tung who had the support of the powerful court eunuch Wang Chih, further embittered relations by engaging throughout the 1470s in unprovoked attacks on previously friendly Jurchen groups and by demanding bribes, portrayed as gifts, from legitimate Jurchen embassies to the court. The Vice Minister of War, Ma Wen-sheng, who visited Liao-tung during this time, objected to Ch'en's actions, but Wang Chin and Ch'en falsely accused him of inciting the Jurchens, and the court transferred him to another frontier region.

Wang Chih's fall in the early 1480s coincided with the development of a less hostile court policy toward the Jurchens. Recognizing that Ch'en Yüeh, with protection from Wang, had often victimized the people along the northeastern borders, the Ming abandoned its military ventures against the Jurchens, reopened border horse markets, and permitted embassies from the various Jurchen guards. Court officials even tolerated evasions of the tribute and trade regulations so that Jurchen missions arrived more frequently, with larger entourages, and greater demands for gifts, and, on occasion, traded illegally with Chinese merchants. Yet, the result was a period of peace that stretched from the late fifteenth to the middle of the sixteenth century.

During this time of relative calm, the Jurchens apparently underwent dramatic changes. The deaths of Tung-shan and Li Man-chu seem to have coincided with a decline of the old style of leaders who inherited their positions through birth into the lineages that had dominated since the late Yüan or early Ming. Paucity of sources prevents clearer understanding of the changes in the internal dynamics of the Jurchens, but that they began to be transformed is undeniable. One significant indication was the growth in size of individual Jurchen groups. In the early fifteenth century, the guards often

consisted of several hundred inhabitants, but, a century later, Jurchen leaders often ruled over thousands and eventually tens of thousands. The leaders themselves seem often to have gained power because of their own merit rather than birth. Additional evidence of changes was the rise in Jurchen demands for agricultural implements from the Ming, confirmation of the growing sedentarization of China's northeastern neighbors. Increasingly, too, the principal focus of the Jurchens was the Ming, with the Koreans playing a lesser role.

This period of harmonious relations ended in the late sixteenth century, in part, due to the changes in Jurchen society. Even earlier, tensions had surfaced as the Chinese, during the Chia-ching (1522–66) reign, reimposed restrictions on tribute and trade and enforced regulations already in place. The first conflict erupted only, however, in the 1570s. Wang Kao of the Chien-chou guard, resenting Ming limitations on commerce, raided Chinese settlements, causing the court to appoint Li Ch'eng-liang, a military commander of Korean descent, to pacify the "unruly barbarians." With the help of Giocangga and his son Takshi, two Jurchen leaders who broke with Wang Kao, Li defeated and killed Wang in 1574. Within the following decade, Li was also called upon to suppress the forces of Wang Wu-t'ang of the Chien-chou and Ch'eng Yang-nu of the Hai-hsi Jurchens. But his most impressive and historically important achievement was his victory over Wang Kao's son A-t'ai. In 1582, he defeated A-t'ai and burned the Chien-chou leader's fort to the ground. Perhaps even more significant was that the fire also took Giocangga's life and that, in the confusion, Li's forces killed Takshi.

The significance of these accidental killings becomes clearer when Nurhachi is identified as Giocangga's grandson and Takshi's son.⁹⁶ Nurhachi, the grandfather of the first ruler of the Ch'ing dynasty and the first organizer of the Manchu people, immediately demanded compensation for the deaths of his father and grandfather, and Li did, indeed, provide presents for the man who would challenge the Ming and whose son and grandson would overthrow the Chinese dynasty.

Nurhachi was not satisfied with these paltry gifts, for he was intent on becoming a major actor on the East Asian stage. To do so, he soon recognized, required unity among the Jurchens who had already made great strides by establishing agricultural communities that could sustain sizeable populations and by developing an iron industry to provide their own farm implements and weapons. He imposed monopolies on ginseng, furs, and pearls and gained control over gold and silver mines, providing him the economic

96 For the most recent biography of Nurgachi, see Yen Ch'ung-nien, *Nu-erb-ha-ch'i chuan* (Peking, 1983).

resources for unifying the Jurchens, building a military force, and attracting Chinese to his side. These Chinese defectors were valuable because they offered him the administrative and financial skills needed to govern the larger Jurchen polity. To establish a true Jurchen government, he required the assistance of literate and administratively competent Chinese. Through marital alliances and conquests facilitated by his control of the wealth of Manchuria, he made himself master of the region by the early seventeenth century, and with the help of Chinese and Mongol advisers actually administered his domains. He was so successful that he incorporated non-Jurchen peoples under his banner, and the groups he now led could be labeled Manchus, with the Jurchens constituting a major segment. In 1616, he assumed the title of emperor of the Chin dynasty, a name apparently chosen to associate his government with that of the Jurchen dynasty that ruled North China in the twelfth and early thirteenth century.

The rise of Nurhachi, in truth, belongs to the history of the Ch'ing dynasty, but it also once again vividly demonstrates the significance of the Inner Asian peoples in Chinese history. The Yüan (1279–1368), a Mongol dynasty, preceded the Ming, and the Ch'ing, a Manchu dynasty, succeeded it. In effect, Inner Asian peoples have ruled China for approximately half of the past seven centuries, a fact which is not often enough emphasized in the study of Chinese civilization and which gives added significance to the Ming's relations with Inner Asia. Study of the Ming's interactions with its northern neighbors challenges some wildly held assumptions that China was ignorant about and inflexible in its dealing with foreigners. The court, its officials, eunuchs, and merchants also, on occasion, profited from trade and tribute with Inner Asia and therefore, for reasons of commerce and security, needed to concern themselves with their northern and western neighbors.

CHAPTER 5

SINO-KOREAN TRIBUTARY RELATIONS UNDER THE MING

THE PATTERN OF SINO-KOREAN TRIBUTARY RELATIONS

Korea is often referred to as a model Chinese tributary state. Indeed, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Korea's tributary relations with China in the development of Korean political institutions and higher culture. Beginning in the seventh century, when the Korean kingdom of Silla entered into an alliance with the T'ang, the Koreans became skilled at adapting Chinese institutions to their own needs. Later, the kingdom of Koryŏ (Chinese: Kao-li, AD 918–1392) continued this pattern of adaptation, watching closely as the Liao, Chin, and Mongol states rose in succession, and evolving forms of tributary relations with each in turn. Korea came under more direct imperial control with the completion of the Mongol conquest in 1270. Thereafter, Koryŏ princes were reared in Peking and were married to Mongol princesses, and Mongol commanderies were established at P'yŏng-yang and Ssangsong.¹

During the decades of Yüan overlordship, as the Koryŏ ruling lineage intermarried with the Yüan imperial family, certain other Korean houses became powerful by marrying daughters to high Yüan officials. Over time, Korean ties to the Yüan became so important that the Koryŏ regime was ill-prepared to cope with the fall of the Yüan in the mid-fourteenth century. In many respects, the fall of Koryŏ and the rise of the state of Chosŏn in 1392 was related to the transition from the Yüan to the Ming dynasty in China, and the evolving relationship between China and Korea during the Ming period is a good example of how the tributary system served each side, both as a political tool and security mechanism, and as a conduit for trade and cultural

1 For the general principles of Sino-Korean tributary relations see Hae-jong Chun (Chŏn Hae-jong), "Sino-Korean tributary relations in the Ch'ing period." In *The Chinese world order*, ed. John King Fairbank (Cambridge, MA, 1968), pp. 90–111. For a survey of the development of Sino-Korean tributary relations, see Chŏn Hae-jong, *Han-jung kwan'gyesa yŏn'gu* (Seoul, 1970), pp. 38–58, with English summary, pp. 250–55. See also *The Ch'in and Han empires, 221 B.C.–AD 220*, Vol. 1, eds. Denis C. Twitchett and Michael Loewe, *The Cambridge History of China* (New York, 1986), pp. 446–51; Denis C. Twitchett, ed., part 1 of *Sui and Tang China, 589–906*, Vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of China* (New York, 1979), pp. 143–47, et passim; *The alien regimes*, Vol. 6, eds. D. Twitchett and Herbert Franke, *The Cambridge History of China* (New York, 1993) pp. 100–04; 219–29; 283; 400–05; 436–37; 473.

transmission. The Koreans, by providing tribute and gestures of submission, bought security and autonomy by forestalling Chinese intervention. By paying tribute, Korean kings also purchased imperial legitimation and support. For the Chinese, the tribute system meant that Korea would strive to act like a loyal vassal state, posing no threat and supporting Chinese security objectives in the area. In Confucian family terms, when Korea accepted the role of younger brother to China, the rules of reciprocity guaranteed the vital interests of both sides.

The course of Sino-Korean tributary relations during the Ming may be divided into several phases. The first phase was the most difficult, as the Koreans struggled to earn the trust of the Ming government. By the end of the Yung-lo reign, the relationship was stable. The tribute system functioned relatively smoothly until the last decade of the sixteenth century, when Korea was invaded by Hideyoshi's armies and had to call on the Ming for military assistance. The war devastated much of Korea both physically and spiritually, and contributed to the weakening of the Ming state as well. During the twilight of the Ming dynasty, the Jurchen invaded Korea and began to collect tribute themselves. The Koreans continued, nonetheless, to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Ming dynasty long after 1644, retaining the Ming calendar and Ming-style institutions. It may therefore be said that if Korea was a model tributary, Korea during the Ming period affords a representative example of the Sino-Korean tributary system at work.

MING-KOREAN RELATIONS: THE FIRST PHASE

Koryŏ and the founding of the Ming

Korea began adjusting to the decline of the Yüan dynasty's control in 1352, shortly after king Kongmin (1330–74) was enthroned. Like his predecessors, Kongmin had been trained in Peking to return to Korea to serve the Yüan. However, shortly after he ascended the throne in 1351, Mongol rule began to break down in China. In 1354, Korean conscript troops witnessed the defeat of Yüan forces at Kao-yü, and the Koryŏ court became convinced that the Yüan regime was in crisis and was about to collapse. King Kongmin responded by severing some of the ties between Korea and the Mongols. He purged a number of Mongol favorites in his court, including relatives of the Korean-born Yüan empress. He decreed an end to wearing Yüan court costumes and hair styles, ended use of the Yüan calendar, and set out to recapture Korean territory in the northeast which the Mongols had allowed to fall under Jurchen control.

These first attempts at reform were frustrated by serious internal problems in Korea. Dissidents sabotaged king Kongmin's new policies. Year after year, Japanese pirates (*wakō*) raided Korea's coasts and drought parched the fields. In 1359 and 1360, rebellions in China spread into Korea: the Red Turbans invaded, seized the capital, and forced king Kongmin to expend much money and effort merely to recover his own realm. In 1365, with Korea already troubled by pressing fiscal and administrative problems, Kongmin's queen died. Following this event, the king left more and more of the business of state to his courtiers. Factions at court quarreled incessantly. Without effective leadership, Korea was poorly prepared to react effectively to the change of regimes that occurred in China in 1368.

When the Ming dynasty was founded in 1368, king Kongmin's first obligation was to offer the new Ming emperor tribute. Kongmin realized that he must do this, but he was faced with a dilemma. Much of Manchuria remained under the control of Mongols who had not yet surrendered to the Ming. This situation left Korea's northern border unprotected against Mongol incursions. To break relations with the Mongols, as the Ming emperor required, was to invite trouble on Korea's northern border. This demand for undivided loyalty to the Ming that conflicted with the need to maintain friendly ties with the Mongols plagued Korea's relations with the Ming until 1387, when Ming armies finally established control over Liao-tung and southern Manchuria.

King Kongmin's government first tried to maintain good relations with both sides, sending regular tribute to the Chinese while maintaining contact with the Mongol chieftain Naghachu (d. 1388) and his forces on the northern border. Contacts with the Mongols, however, were not always peaceful and armed skirmishes were common. In 1370, Kongmin went so far as to send an armed force into Liao-tung to stabilize the region. This campaign did double damage: not only did it fail to impress the Mongols, it also drew a strong reaction from the Ming court, which perceived it as an encroachment. In response, the Hung-wu emperor accused Kongmin of bad faith and increased his demands for tribute.

In 1374, king Kongmin was murdered by his own eunuchs. Korea had to report the event to the Ming emperor and to petition for the investiture of Kongmin's successor, a prince named U (1364–98). Normally, investiture of a new king would have been a routine matter, but the events of 1374 in Korea cast a shadow over the new king's reign. Kongmin's murder required an investigation and the punishment of the assassins. To make matters worse, it was rumored that king U was not, in fact, the son of Kongmin, but the son of Sin Ton (d. 1371), a Buddhist priest who had served for several years as Kongmin's close advisor. To complicate matters still further, a

Ming envoy, en route home soon after Kongmin's death, was also killed. The murders and the doubts about king U's paternity gave the Ming court ample reason to withhold investiture until all the facts were known. This delay, however, forced king U to begin his reign crippled by the lack of Chinese support; his very presence on the throne serving as a cause of friction with the Ming. The Hung-wu emperor, by withholding investiture, forced king U to beg for Ming support, an action that served to emphasize his weakness and to aggravate the political turmoil in Korea that followed Kongmin's death.

Like Kongmin before him, king U had to deal with Mongol power on his northern border and had to stay on good terms both with the Mongols and with the Ming. The Hung-wu emperor, hearing that the Koreans were still dealing with Naghachu, retaliated by rejecting Korean envoys through the early 1380s. As a consequence, for several years Korea had no relations with the Ming court.

It was not until 1385, after king U had demonstrated his ability to survive despite the lack of Ming support, that the Hung-wu emperor relented and began to accept Korean tribute once more. The settlement involved a trade: investiture of king U in exchange for a single payment of back tribute and an agreement to stay out of the forthcoming Ming confrontation with Naghachu in Manchuria.

When Ming forces accepted the surrender of Naghachu in 1387, however, they went on to organize the Sino-Korean border region into garrisons (*wei*). Part of this effort involved incorporating the former Mongol K'ai-yüan district into the Liao-tung garrison network, thereby bringing north-eastern Korea under Ming control. This was a serious challenge to the Koreans, and the anti-Ming faction in king U's court persuaded him to order a military expedition to block Ming expansion beyond Liao-tung.

King U's armed probe into Liao-tung in 1388 was a misstep, for it became the catalyst for the fall of Koryŏ and the founding of the Chosŏn dynasty (also known as the Yi dynasty). Under the command of general Yi Sŏng-gye (1355–1405),² the army turned back when it reached the Yalu and marched on the capital of Kaegyŏng instead. General Yi took control of the government and, after ruling for four years through puppet kings, took the throne for himself and founded the Chosŏn dynasty.

The conflict in Ming-Korean relations was clearly a contributing element in the change from Koryŏ to Chosŏn in Korea. Added to such problems as the effects of a prolonged drought, the inability to protect the coasts from Japanese pirates, and the widespread dissatisfaction with the existing systems

2 DMB, pp. 1598–1603.

of land tenure and taxation, king U's failure to stabilize relations with China invited Yi Sŏng-gye's coup. Moreover, general Yi won crucial support from reformist elements at court which opposed Koryŏ's prevailing policies which supported Buddhist institutions, maintained landed families in positions of influence, and continued contact with the Mongols. The reformers favored Confucian statecraft and desired to suppress Buddhism, reform land tenure and taxation, recruit officials through merit tests, and rectify Korea's relationship with China through a policy of *sadae* (Chinese: *shih ta*), or Serve the Great.

Ming-Korean relations in the early Chosŏn dynasty

Because he was technically a usurper, Yi Sŏng-gye (temple name: T'aejo, r. 1392–98) particularly needed legitimation. For him, Ming investiture was no less a requirement than it had been for his predecessors. On founding the new dynasty in 1392, one of his first acts was to dispatch a report to the emperor along with a petition for imperial recognition. The Ming government, however, accepted the news of his accession with mixed reactions. On the one hand, the emperor decreed that Korea be known by its ancient name of Ch'ao-hsien (Korean: "Chosŏn" often translated as "Land of the Morning Calm") and commended the king for his proper behavior, implying acceptance. On the other hand, the Ministry of Rites, in a separate communication, expressed displeasure at being presented a *fait accompli* in Korea and warned T'aejo not to invite trouble by acting like his predecessors. Although he claimed he had taken the throne only after ceaseless entreaties by his people, the Ming discounted his version of events. As long as the Hung-wu emperor lived, he always referred to the Korean king by temporary titles, emphasizing the revocable nature of Ming toleration. This equivocation remained a handicap throughout T'aejo's entire reign.

Why was the Ming government so cool toward the new regime in Korea? The explanation lies, in part, in the Ming perception of the circumstances surrounding T'aejo's rise to power. Despite Korean assertions to the contrary, the Ming believed the new Korean king to be the son of Yi In-im (d. 1388), one of the notorious ministers of later Koryŏ. They further believed that T'aejo had murdered the last three Koryŏ kings during his rise. Nothing could persuade the Chinese to change their view of events in Korea; indeed, it was not until 1587, with the publication of a new edition of the collected *Statutes of the Ming dynasty*, that they even acknowledged the Korean protests.³

3 L. Carrington Goodrich, "Korean interference with Chinese historical records," *Journal of the north China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 68 (1937), pp. 27–34.

Chinese security problems in the border regions of the northeast offer another explanation for the Ming court's reluctance to recognize the legitimacy of the Chosŏn dynasty. Although the Yi family's clan seat was Chŏnju, in southwestern Korea, T'aejo's father had spent much of his career as a border official in the Hamgyŏng region of northeastern Korea where the Korean and Jurchen peoples mingled freely, sometimes in war, sometimes in trade. He had come of age there, learning to excel in horsemanship and the martial sports which the Jurchen enjoyed most, skills which contributed to his success as a warrior later on. After he succeeded to his father's border command in 1370, he kept in touch with his Jurchen neighbors. Sometimes he recruited them into his forces. Some of his better subordinate commanders were in fact Jurchen, and at least one of his inner circle of merit subjects (*kong-sin*; Ch. *kung-ch'en*)⁴ after 1392 was a Jurchen who had surrendered to him earlier. As the Ming saw it, familiarity with non-Korean border peoples raised the potential danger of Korean-Jurchen collaboration, something which could hinder the extension of Ming control over Manchuria.

The later phases of T'aejo's military career before he took the throne further encouraged the Ming to be on their guard. He had led king Kong-min's probe against the Mongols in Liao-tung in 1370, and he was familiar with the terrain and its defenses. He had taken power in 1388 while leading a second campaign intended to challenge Ming expansion into the same area. Throughout his reign, the Ming authorities were convinced that he was inviting Jurchen settlers to populate the Korean-controlled borderlands, and that the settlers were using Korean territory as a staging area for raids into China. It appeared to the Ming that the Koreans were resisting the Ming policy of keeping the peoples of the northeast safely apart. All these things together constituted considerable grounds for suspicion.

Other vexing problems arose to frustrate Korea's attempts to normalize relations with the Ming. Poorly worded memorials from Korea offended the emperor, who was always sensitive to real or imagined slights. On two occasions the emperor actually sent to Korea for the writer of the offending memorial, intending to punish him for *lèse-majesté*. In the first instance the Koreans simply stalled. In the second, in which the writer was Chŏng To-jŏn (d. 1398), one of T'aejo's closest advisors, a top-level Korean delegation managed to persuade the emperor that no offense had been intended. But when a third case occurred in 1397–98, the emperor's patience apparently was exhausted. He closed the border and threatened another complete break

4 The term "merit subjects" for *kong-sin*, is used in Korean history as in China. In the case of the Chosŏn dynasty, several *kong-sin* rosters were created to reward loyal supporters of T'aejo (1392–98), Chongjong (1398–1400), and T'aejo (1400–18). The rewards were grants of lands and slaves, and, in most cases, appointments to high office.

in relations with Korea. This precipitated a crisis at the Korean court, during which there was renewed talk of attacking Liao-tung as a show of Korean determination not to be bullied. This era of conflict in Ming-Korean relations ended abruptly in 1398 with T'aejo's abdication in Korea and the death of the Hung-wu emperor in Nanking.

T'aejo's abdication in 1398 was followed by a succession struggle among his sons. Prince Pang-gwa (1357–1419; temple name: Chǒngjong) reigned until 1400, when he was overthrown by his brother Pang-wŏn' (1367–1422; temple name: T'aejong) who reigned until 1418. The princes' wars in Korea coincided with the short reign of Chu Yün-wen, the Chien-wen emperor, in China, during which the heirs of the Hung-wu emperor fought over the Ming succession.

During the years immediately following the death of the first Ming emperor, Ming-Korean relations began anew. Each side had uses for the other, and the contenders for the Ming succession both cultivated Korean cooperation. In Nanking, the Chien-wen emperor needed Korean tribute horses for defense against his uncle, Chu Ti, Prince of Yen, who later became the Yung-lo emperor and who, at that time, was seeking to overthrow him. The Prince of Yen, who held the northeast, needed to secure the Korean border so he could safely advance to the south against his nephew. Thus, contenders for the Chinese throne were more willing than the Hung-wu emperor had been to restore normal relations with Korea. The Chien-wen emperor invested both King Chongjong and his brother King T'aejong with little hesitation.

The value of Korean tribute as a factor in the Chinese succession struggle is suggested by a Chinese request in the summer of 1401 for 10,000 horses. By then, warfare between the Chien-wen emperor and the Prince of Yen had spread down toward the Yangtze River, and the imperial forces found it ever more difficult to contend with the Prince of Yen's cavalry. This situation made the investiture of the Korean monarch necessary in order to obtain horses through tribute trade. Korean relations with the Ming court until the middle of 1402 consisted mainly of the delivery of these animals in exchange for large amounts of Chinese silk and cotton cloth.⁶

The Yung-lo emperor continued the friendly tone of relations with Korea when he began his reign in 1403. King T'aejong offered tribute immediately upon hearing of his accession, and the Yung-lo emperor reciprocated by investing him as king without delay. Typical of the new Ming attitude toward Korea was the emperor's repatriation of a number of Koreans taken captive

5 DMB, pp. 1594–98.

6 Suematsu Yasukazu, *Raimatsu senshōni okeru tai Min kankei* (Keijō [Seoul], 1941), p. 140.

before 1398 and the gift of Chinese medicines to treat the new king's aging father in retirement.⁷

The contrast between Ming attitudes toward Korea before and after 1398 expresses some general characteristics of Ming foreign policy during this period. Because the Hung-wu emperor was concerned with consolidating and expanding Ming control in border areas, he followed an aggressive policy of intimidating the Koreans into acting in accordance with Ming interests. His successor, the Chien-wen emperor, was preoccupied with his own survival. He needed Korea's help and had to accept the Koreans' assurances of loyalty and support at face value. The Yung-lo emperor's attitude combined these two attitudes: although he had the power to intimidate Korea, he also knew that it enhanced his position to be seen as the recipient of tribute from foreign rulers.

This early phase of Ming-Korean relations demonstrates another aspect of the tributary system. Although the Chinese government depended on allies and tributaries to honor their agreements, it especially did so when a new dynasty was consolidating its power in China. Between 1370 and 1395, Korea was obliged at times to forego keeping its commitments to the Ming because conditions in Korea and along the border were so unsettled. It was not until after 1395 that there was sufficient stability in the Korean court to guarantee that agreements with the Ming would be kept. The Ming government recognized this stability when King T'aejong came to power at the beginning of the Yung-lo reign, and it opened the way to a new and happier period in Ming-Korean relations.

These events of the late fourteenth century demonstrated Korea's interest in the tributary system. The aims of Korea were security and autonomy. These were usually purchased by tributary relations with China, but their achievement sometimes required concurrent relations with the Mongols or the Jurchen, despite Chinese disapproval. The Koreans also resisted Ming demands in other ways, as, for example, when they refused to send the councillor Chǒng To-jǒn to China to answer for his allegedly disrespectful memorial. Although security was important, at times, the Koreans appear to have prized their autonomy even more.

TRIBUTE MISSIONS

Korean embassies to China

Korean tribute missions to China during the Ming period comprised three congratulatory embassies each year, one sent at the beginning of the lunar

⁷ *MS*, 320, p. 8284.

year and one each sent on the birthdays of the emperor and of the heir apparent. Later, it was common to dispatch an embassy on the occasion of the winter solstice. There were many other special embassies as well: to offer thanks (*chinha*), condolences (*chiniwi*), incense (*chinhyang*) obituary notices (*kobu*), and embassies to present horses (*amma*), or special memorials (*chumun*). In addition, particularly in the early Ming period, when so many problems upset the routine of Sino-Korean relations, special embassies were dispatched to present petitions during the various negotiations between the Ming and Korean courts. The frequency of these embassies sometimes provoked protests from the Ministry of Rites, which bore the enormous cost of hosting foreign envoys in China. During the Hung-wu era, the excessive number of unscheduled Korean tribute missions became a sore point; yet the Koreans persisted in sending them, mainly because of the symbolic value of the tribute trade.

Between 1392 and 1450, the Chosŏn court dispatched 391 envoys to China: on average, about seven each year. Not all went to Peking; some went only to Liao-yang to conduct business relating to border affairs. The number of embassies sent each year reflected the state of Ming-Korean relations: the number diminished over time as conflicts became more rare. From an average of eight each year around 1400, the number dropped to an average of 3.7 per year in the reign of king Sŏngjong (1457–94; r. 1469–94). The number rose again during the political crisis in Korea surrounding the removal of King Yŏsan (1476–1506; r. 1494–1506) in 1506, while the new king, Chungjong (1488–1544; r. 1506–44), sought investiture. Normally, however, the number of embassies required to maintain good relations did not exceed three or four each year.

Korean tribute missions typically consisted of about forty people. The entourage normally included an envoy with ministerial rank, a vice-envoy, secretary, translator, physician, scribe-calligrapher, brush keeper, groom, valets, porters, and slaves. The size of the retinue reflected the leader's rank: the entourage of a prince en route to Peking naturally would be larger than that of a horse tribute escort bound for Liao-yang.

A standard list of Korean tribute items was published in the *Collected statutes of the Ming*. Tribute articles provided to the Ming included gold, silver, woven mats of various kinds, leopard skins, sea otter skins, white silk, different types of dyed linen cloth, hemp cloth, mother-of-pearl inlaid comb boxes, white paper, brushes, and ginseng. Fifty stud horses were supposed to be sent every three years as well.⁸ Not mentioned were the periodic special requisitions for cattle, additional numbers of horses, cotton cloth, materials

8 *TMHT*, 105, p. 4.

for making weapons, tea, pepper, grain, and, most objectionable of all, people – slaves, young girls, and eunuchs. The official list named mainly Korean goods whose quality excelled what was to be found in China, and it underscores the commercial element of tributary relations. Korean ginseng and paper commanded particularly high prices in the markets of Peking.

Indeed, the opportunities for profit afforded by travel to and from China accounted at least in part for the Koreans' enthusiasm for more frequent embassies.⁹ This enthusiasm was born of the fact that the Chosŏn government, assuming its envoys would carry things to barter privately with merchants while en route and in Peking, paid them relatively little from state funds. Because this Korean trade on the side involved unauthorized contact with border people – mainly with the Jurchen tribes – it was a constant irritant to Ming officials who wanted to keep the Koreans and the Jurchen apart. In Peking, the envoys were supposed to deal only with the Ministry of Rites, which hosted the Koreans and handled their tribute goods and the gifts which were sent back to the king of Korea. Yet, as soon as the envoys arrived in the capital, Chinese brokers descended upon them to buy up their extra ginseng, furs, paper, brushes, and the like, while the Koreans, in turn, set about buying their own supplies.

Although private trade was important, if frowned upon, what the Koreans prized most about the tribute trade were the return gifts which the Chinese emperor sent to the king of Korea. Indeed, this channel of trade was a principal conduit for Chinese influence in Korean culture. Return gifts included items useful in court ceremonials: dragon robes and jeweled belts, for example.¹⁰ Musical instruments were frequently on the gift list and costumes for the royal family, ornaments, silks, jade, and drugs were likewise common.

Chinese books were probably the item that had the widest influence in Korea. Korean embassies always brought back editions of the Chinese classics with commentaries, as well as treatises, histories, and other literature of all kinds – all of which could be reprinted and disseminated in Korea. Books were also the means by which new institutions were transmitted from China to Korea during the early Ming period. The early Ming law code, for example, served as the model for the Chosŏn dynasty code first promulgated in 1394, and for the basic penal statutes as well.¹¹ Although the Koreans regularly adapted Chinese ideas and institutions to their own environment, the tribute

9 Gari K. Ledyard, "Korean travelers in China over four hundred years, 1488–1887," *Occasional papers on Korea*, 2 (March, 1974), p. 4.

10 Ō Suk-kwŏn, *Kosa chwaryo* (1613 ed. Kyujanggak series No. 7; photographic rpt. Keijō [Seoul], 1941), 1, pp. 12b–14b.

11 William R. Shaw, *Legal norms in a Confucian state* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 4–5.

trade was of unparalleled importance as a channel for cultural influence as well as commerce.

Korean envoys usually followed one of two routes to China. By land, they went from Seoul to P'yŏng-yang and Ŭiju, crossed the Yalu River, proceeded to Shen-yang via Feng-huang, and then to Peking through Shan-hai Pass. The entire trip took about thirty days. The sea route was longer: 5,600 *li* including land portions, taking Korea delegations from Seoul past P'yŏng-yang to Sŏnch'ŏn, thence to the seaside town of Ch'ŏlsan and the offshore island of Kado. There travelers embarked for the often dangerous Yellow Sea crossing to Teng-chou in Shantung, whence they proceeded overland to Peking. In Peking the Koreans were hosted by the Korean Relating Institute (*T'ung wen kuan*) and were schooled in ceremonial etiquette by the Ministry of Rites. The Hall of the Jade River (*yü ho kuan*) in the southeastern part of the city was typical of the accommodations provided for them.

Interpreters furnished by both sides helped the Koreans communicate, for, although the envoys often were skilled at writing, in classical Chinese, their spoken Chinese was not as good. To rectify this the Koreans established their own Bureau of Translation (*Sayŏgwan*) to train translators and interpret foreign documents. Most Korean tribute delegations drew personnel from this bureau; but because interpreting was regarded as a technical specialty, language experts, however essential, were always relegated to an inferior status. Thus, candidates for the Bureau of Translation typically came from members of the nonaristocratic *chungin* (middle people) class of specialists who lacked the social standing of the envoys themselves, who belonged to the *yangban* or scholar-gentry class.

Ming embassies to Korea

When Ming ambassadors went to Korea they used the same routes the Koreans did in reverse, although they usually traveled by land. When they reached Liao-tung, they sent a messenger ahead to Ŭiju to alert the magistrate (*puyun*) there. He, in turn, relayed word to the governor of P'yŏngan province, who sent a messenger on to Seoul. The Korean court, therefore, was aware in advance of any approaching Ming delegation, but it rarely knew the nature of the delegation's business until the party arrived near Seoul at the *Mohwagwan*, a special hostelry on the hill above what is now Independence Gate. Once in the capital itself, the Ming envoys were royally entertained at the *T'aep'yŏnggwan*, a comfortable residence maintained for them just inside the south gate of the city.

Ming embassies had various purposes: to inquire and investigate; to announce the imperial succession or the naming of an heir apparent; or simply

to convey edicts and rescripts or instructions and requisitions from the Ministry of Rites. The most ceremonial of the embassies came to confer a patent of investiture on newly enthroned Korean kings.

Ming representatives journeyed to Korea relatively infrequently for most of the business of Ming-Korean relations was better conducted through the regular Korean missions to Peking. Between 1392 and 1450 there were ninety-five Ming embassies to Korea, fifty of which took place between 1400 and 1418, the part of the Yung-lo reign during which Sino-Korean relations were stabilized. Between 1460 and 1506 there were twenty-six Ming embassies: between 1506 and 1567 there were only ten. During king Sŏnjo's forty-one-year reign (1567–1607), thirty-five Ming embassies were dispatched to the Korean court owing to the need to coordinate Ming and Korean defenses against Hideyoshi's invading armies in the 1590s. The total number of embassies for the period from 1392 to 1644 was 186, an average of less than one per year.¹²

Hsieh Ssu (d. 1380+),¹³ the first Ming envoy to Korea, arrived in 1369 with the Hung-wu emperor's edict announcing the founding of the Ming and requesting Korea's submission in return. Hsieh returned in 1370 to present king Kongmin with the all-important symbols of legitimacy – the emperor's writ appointing him king and a golden seal – together with copies of the classics, the Ming calendar, ritual objects including musical instruments, and forty bolts of fine cloth.¹⁴

The cordiality of Hsieh Ssu's visits to Korea was not typical of some subsequent Ming embassies. Ming envoys were often eunuchs, sometimes Korean-born eunuchs who had been part of the fourteenth-century traffic in human beings. Their deportment in Korea caused problems. They were sometimes overbearing and offensive and they stayed longer than regular Chinese ambassadors, incurring higher costs for entertainment. The visit of the Korean-born Ming eunuch, Sin Kwi-saeng (Chinese: Shen Kuei-sheng), in 1398 is a case in point: Sin repeatedly insulted his Korean hosts, alternately demanding and refusing hospitality, refusing to speak Korean, and humiliating senior officials. At one point, he even got drunk and brandished a knife at a dinner in the presence of the king.¹⁵ Native Chinese eunuchs were not much better as ambassadors. The Ming eunuch Huang Yen,¹⁶ for example,

12 Yi Hyŏn-jong, "Tae-Myŏng kwan'gye," *Han'guksa*, 9 (Seoul, 1973), p. 324.

13 DMB, pp. 559–60.

14 Chŏng In-ji, comp., *Koryŏsa* (1454; rpt. Seoul, 1972), *kwŏn* (chūan) 29, p. 5b.

15 *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* [Yijŏ sillok], *T'aejong sillok* (T'aebaeksanpon, 1400–45; 2nd printing 1603–06; facsimile rpt., ed. Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏn hoe, 1955–58; facsimile rpt. Seoul: T'amgudang, 1968–70), 14, pp. 15b–16; 16b–17.

16 DMB, pp. 1596–97.

who visited Korea six times between 1403 and 1411, came to be thoroughly disliked for his overbearing manner and the way he raided temples for Buddhist artifacts in the name of the emperor. Huang Yen was also notorious as a collector of young girls for the imperial harem. Such incidents, added to the considerable cost of hosting Ming delegations, heightened the sense of dread with which the Koreans contemplated approaching Ming missions.

Among the most detailed accounts of Ming embassies to Korea was that of Tung Yüeh (cs. 1469), chancellor of the Hanlin Academy, who went to Korea in 1488 to announce the accession of the Hung-chih emperor to the Ming throne. Tung Yüeh recorded his observations of Korea during the reign of king Söngjong (1469–94) in a prose poem on Korea (*Ch'ao-hsien fu*), a diary of his embassy (*Shih tung jih lu*), and a private miscellany on his trip to Korea (*Ch'ao-hsien tsa chih*).¹⁷ Tung Yüeh seems to have been charmed by his Korean hosts, and his writings convey a positive impression of the people and their officials during the reign of king Söngjong, which was a particularly placid period in Ming-Korean relations. Tung Yüeh's writings serve to show that in the absence of suspicion, when each side wanted only to maintain the basic suzerain relationship, Sino-Korean relations could be cordial. Nevertheless, the relationship was fundamentally unequal, involving an element of Chinese overlordship which was felt acutely when Ming envoys came to the Chosön capital. This was another reason why the Koreans preferred to do most of their business with China in Peking.

THE MING-KOREAN-JURCHEN TRIANGLE

Korean contact with the Jurchen tribes

The Jurchen peoples of Manchuria influenced Ming-Korean relations long after the stabilization of relations in 1403. Both Korea and Ming China wanted to control the Jurchen for reasons of security; problems arose when Korea competed with Ming China to influence the Jurchen through political symbols and tributary trade. In the 1390s, Jurchen leaders acknowledged Korea's overlordship by sending tribute missions to the Korean court. However, during the Yung-lo reign, the emperor set out to bring the Jurchen firmly under the Ming court's control.

The Koreans' interest in Liao-tung and southern Manchuria (the regions inhabited by the Chien-chou Jurchen) stemmed from the fact that many of their ancestors had lived there until the tenth century. During the Koryö per-

¹⁷ DMB, p. 259. See excerpts of Tung Yüeh's diary translated in James Scarth Gale, "Hanyang," *Transactions of the Korea branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, II (1902), pp. 35–43.

iod, however, Korea lost control of land adjacent to the Yalu and Tumen rivers. The Liao, Chin, and Yüan all actually incorporated parts of northern Korea directly into their empires. Steady migration, stimulated by border warfare and encouraged by access to agricultural land, had shifted the population center of the Korean people toward the southern reaches of the peninsula. After 1350, when king Kongmin set out to assert Korean autonomy from Yüan rule, the recovery of lost territory emerged as an explicit goal, and Korea began to pressure the Mongolian and Jurchen tribes in these lands. The last decades of the Koryŏ period saw a policy of northward expansion, sometimes by fighting, sometimes by diplomatic means, and sometimes through variations on the theme of tributary trade. Naghachu's surrender to the Ming in 1387 created a vacuum which the Koreans were eager to fill, but it also opened the way for a Ming thrust through Liao-tung as far as the Yalu River. This created a potentially dangerous triangle of competing interests in the frontier area involving Ming China, Korea, and the Jurchen tribes.

Korea had reason to worry about the growth of Ming power along the Yalu River. By 1390, Korea had invested thirty years of effort in recovering lost borderlands, yet northern Korea remained sparsely settled, poorly cultivated, and difficult to defend. Northeastern Korea is mountainous and lacks farmland; north central Korea suffers cruel winters. Because periodic attempts to resettle Koreans in these areas had failed, the Chosŏn government allowed Manchurian peoples to live there if they would submit to Korean jurisdiction. In the late 1390s, Korea divided northern Korea into districts to be governed by officials of the central government. Thus, the Chosŏn court became involved in wooing and controlling the Chien-chou Jurchen population.

The Hung-wu emperor was always on guard against collusion between the Koreans and the Jurchen and tried to keep the two sides apart. Korean tribute missions were instructed to travel by sea whenever possible to avoid contact with their Jurchen neighbors. When it was necessary to use the land route, he ordered them not to trade or talk with the natives as they passed between the Yalu River and the Chinese frontier. He also tried to stop Jurchen migrations into Korea. In the 1380s, he told the Koreans to establish a definite boundary, withdraw to the south of it, and expel non-Korean refugees living on the Korean side. Koryŏ failed to satisfy him on this point, and so, in 1388, apparently intending to define the northern boundary of Korea himself, he announced his claim to the entire K'ai-yüan region as far as Hamgyŏng province. The Koreans saw that many years of effort to recover northern borderlands were about to be lost by this imperial command. Their decision to challenge Ming China for control of Liao-tung led directly to General Yi Sŏng-gye's march to the Yalu River, his subsequent coup, and his founding

of the Chosŏn dynasty. The struggle to control the border region, therefore, played a critical part in the change from Koryŏ to Chosŏn.

Ming policy toward the Jurchen

Ming policy toward the Jurchen was intended to help extend Chinese power into the northeast and to maintain peace and security. The Chinese wanted to have a monopoly on Jurchen trade through the tribute system. They wanted to reduce or eliminate contact between the Jurchen and their neighbors, whether Mongols or Koreans, in order to prevent the formation of hostile alliances. To this end, the Ming court organized the Jurchen into garrisons (*wei*) under a Chinese chain of command in the ancient “loose rein” tradition of administration, rewarding Jurchen leaders with gifts, titles, and similar perquisites. The aim of this policy was to bring the Jurchen peoples under Ming control as tributaries, in effect, extending Ming power into Manchuria through them.

During the early fifteenth century, in part owing to the preoccupation with the succession crisis, Manchuria remained beyond Chinese control. Menggetimur (d. 1433),¹⁸ chief of the Odoli subtribe of the Chien-chou Jurchen, had in fact moved into Korea south of the Tumen River. Because he offered tribute to the Chosŏn court and had encamped at Hoeryŏng (Chinese: Huining), the Koreans regarded him as their vassal. Menggetimur, therefore, was a prime target when the Ming began wooing the Jurchen into the Chinese fold. In 1405 Menggetimur, along with A-ha-ch’u, his neighbor, who had been invested by the Ming in 1403 as chief of the main Chien-chou garrison, began to receive a procession of Chinese officials bearing gifts and proposals for a Ming-Jurchen alliance.

The effect of Ming contacts with the Jurchen

In 1404 the Koreans had given Menggetimur the title of Myriarch of Odoli; in 1405 the first Chinese envoys to visit him called him “Commander of the Odoli garrison,” an indication of their assumption that he would be willing, like A-ha-ch’u, to become part of the Chinese defense network. At first Menggetimur resisted being taken for granted by the Chinese and professed to be committed to Korea. Meanwhile, the Koreans countered with efforts of their own to keep him in their orbit. They sent him delegations bearing gifts, praise, and instructions on how best to handle the Chinese. They cam-

¹⁸ DMB, pp. 1065–67.

paigned in the northeast among other Jurchen chiefs as well, encouraging them not to yield to Ming pressure.

In 1405 the Chosŏn government went so far as to appeal directly to the Yung-lo emperor to leave Menggetimur alone. Arguing against a plan to invite him to pay his respects to the Ming court, the Koreans asserted that the Jurchen chief should be regarded as a Korean subject because he lived on Korean territory. Moreover, they argued, he could ill afford to leave his tribe for fear of being overthrown by rivals. Nevertheless, Menggetimur eventually made the trip and accepted a Ming appointment as regional commissioner. He had little choice. Ming support had greatly enhanced the power of his rival A-ha-ch'u. To continue to resist the Ming would have been to invite trouble. Under the circumstances, Korea's bid for his loyalty was doomed to run a poor second.¹⁹

The Ming government sent Korea assurances that Menggetimur's submission would not compromise Korean territory since it was an act of personal fealty rather than a cession of land. However, the example of Menggetimur's defection was quickly followed by other Jurchen chieftains who went to Nanking to obtain their share of gifts and titles. Early in 1406, it was clear that Korea had lost this contest. Competition with the Ming was beyond the means of the Chosŏn court. If the Koreans had envisioned using a tribute system of their own to array the Jurchen along the border as a buffer against the Ming, they found themselves outmaneuvered and obliged to shift their strategy toward a more conventional military defense.²⁰

Korea did not sever relations with the Jurchen after this defeat, but such special facilities for them as the market at Kyŏngwŏn in the far northeast, where Jurchen tribespeople had been permitted to trade for Korean salt, iron, oxen, and horses, were no longer provided. Closing the market simply led to another problem, however, for the Jurchen took to stealing what was no longer available for purchase. Moreover, in 1406 the Ming established a competing market for horse trading with the Jurchen south of K'ai-yüan.²¹ Having accomplished nothing by closing off trade, within a year, the Koreans reopened Kyŏngwŏn and a second market at Kyongsŏng, to the south.²²

Between 1406 and 1410, Korean relations with the Jurchen quickly degenerated into a pattern of raids and reprisals. The attempt to win peace on the border by reopening the markets had little effect and the cost of trying to con-

19 *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, *T'aejong sillok*, 10, p. 12b.

20 *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, *T'aejong sillok*, 12, p. 24b. See also Henry Serruys, *Sino-Jurchen relations during the Yung-lo period (1403-1424)*, (Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 42-61.

21 Morris Rossabi, *The Jurchen in Yüan and Ming*, Cornell University East Asia Papers, No. 27 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), p. 35.

22 *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, *T'aejong sillok*, 11, p. 21b.

trol the region rose dramatically. The death of a Korean commander in a battle with the Jurchen prompted king T'aejong to abandon the far northeast altogether in 1410, for as outposts Kyongsŏng and Kyŏngwŏn were simply indefensible.

Menggetimur, meanwhile, grew tired of taking the brunt of Korean reprisals. In 1411 he moved his Odoli tribe westward to Feng-chou, next to the Ming Chien-chou garrison, which was then under the control of Li Hsien-chung, the son of his rival A-ha-ch'u. There the Ming appointed him chief of a separate but equal garrison, the left Chien-chou garrison. This position also failed to satisfy him. For a decade he chafed at playing second fiddle to the main Chien-chou guard; then in 1423 he decamped once more to Hoeryŏng on the Tumen River. Thereafter, until his death in 1433, Menggetimur professed to serve both Korea and the Ming. His descendants continued to rule the left Chien-chou garrison, uniting periodically with the main Jurchen tribes. The Manchus eventually arose from this tribal sub-group of the Jurchen: Nurhaci himself claimed descent from Menggetimur.

The Koreans responded to all this instability on the border by retreating, recouping, carrying on correct relations with both the Ming and the Jurchen, and planning for an eventual reconquest of the northeast. Their maps continued to show the administrative units of Korea up to the Yalu and Tumen rivers. In 1434, under king Sejong, the restoration campaign began anew, taking advantage of a war between the Odoli and the Wutiha tribes of the Jurchen. The success of Korean armies in expelling the Jurchen from north-central Korea was followed immediately by a forced resettlement to establish a meaningful Korean presence there for the first time, with each southern province providing a quota of new settlers. During the decade of the restoration campaign, Korean armies attacked across the Yalu and Tumen rivers on numerous occasions. By the end of king Sejong's reign in 1450, Korea had established its own chain of commanderies along the Tumen River into the Ch'ang-pai mountain uplands and had effective control of what was later to become Hamgyŏng province. A corresponding series of civil administrative units was established along the middle reaches of the Yalu River, consolidating Korean control over territory which was to remain in Korean hands until modern times.

The Chosŏn dynasty's aggressive policy toward the Jurchen had its Ming counterpart. The Jurchen began causing trouble for the Chinese in 1433, when A-ha-ch'u's grandson, Li Man-chu (d. 1476), then commander of the main Chien-chou garrison, began armed raids on neighboring territories to protest restrictions imposed on him by the Chinese and Koreans. Though Li Man-chu was technically a Ming official, he was not particularly loyal and he often raided villages in Liao-tung. As the Ming court's control of the

northeast slowly broke down in the 1440s, Li Man-chu and other Jurchen leaders joined informally with the Mongolian Uriyangkha tribes in their invasions of Liao-tung. Jurchen recruits also joined Esen (d. 1455), the Oirat chief, in raids which seriously eroded Liao-tung's defenses and contributed to the Ming weakness that was demonstrated in the T'u-mu débâcle of 1449.²³ Chinese attempts to punish the Jurchen by cutting off trade had much the same result as earlier, similar moves by Korea: the Jurchen simply raided more often.

By 1450, the Jurchen were convinced that Korea had joined forces with the Ming to crush them, and they began fighting on Korean soil. This border warfare culminated in 1466–67, following rumors of a proposed Chien-chou invasion of Korea. A combined force of 50,000 Ming troops and 10,000 Koreans joined in a major campaign against the Jurchen. In an attack on the principal Chien-chou tribes, Li Man-chu and his son Ku-na-ha were killed. In China, Tung-shan, Menggetimur's son, was assassinated. These events eliminated some of the Jurchen tribes' most competent leaders and interrupted the fighting for a time. During this period, the Jurchen reestablished tributary relations with the Ming court.

But warfare on the Ming-Jurchen-Korean border did not cease altogether. Barely a decade after the joint Sino-Korean campaign, the Ming asked the Chosŏn court to send troops across the Yalu River to strike at the Chien-chou tribes' encampments. Again, the action had no lasting effect, for raids and skirmishes on the Korean border had, by this time, become a way of life. During the latter half of the sixteenth century, when Ming-Jurchen relations had again degenerated into quarrels over trade and tribute, the violence on the Korean border resumed. When Hideyoshi invaded Korea in 1592, the best Korean commanders the Chosŏn court could find were generals who had learned their tactics during the endemic wars against the Jurchen in the northeast.

OTHER ISSUES IN MING-KOREAN RELATIONS

The granting of investiture

Several other issues affected Ming-Korean relations during the Ming period. Foremost among these was the problem of investiture. The Hung-wu emperor's reluctance to invest Korean kings caused friction in the early years of the dynasty, but it was rarely a problem after the Yung-lo reign. Nonetheless,

23 See part 1 of *The Ming dynasty, 1368–1644*, vol. 7, eds. F. W. Mote and D. C. Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China* (New York, 1988), pp. 322–31.

because investiture was a sign that the emperor recognized a new ruler's legitimacy, the Ming court was concerned with the way Korean kings came to power. The *Official history of the Ming* records that the Chinese withheld investiture twice, when King Sejo (1417–68; r. 1455–68) usurped the throne in 1455 and when King Chungjong overthrew King Yönsan in 1506. Sejo deposed his nephew Tanjong (1441–57; r. 1452–55), a boy who had been duly invested by the Ming emperor as heir apparent and then as king. The matter was solved when the Ming emperor accepted Sejo's claim that Tanjong had been too young and sickly to continue as an effective ruler. The fact that the Chinese needed Korean cooperation in their ongoing wars with the Jurchen may account for their willingness to tolerate such irregularities.

The second case, Chungjong's coup of 1506, took longer to resolve. Chungjong was put into power by a group of officials who had grievances against his predecessor and half-brother King Yönsan. The coup itself was nearly bloodless, but the entire event was surrounded by purges which gave it a violent cast. The Ming government granted Chungjong a temporary title pending an investigation, but stopped short of actual investiture. Numerous appeals flowed from Korea to the Ministry of Rites in Peking, (including one from the queen mother sanctioning the succession) before the Ming court finally relented, having procrastinated over a year.²⁴ Both cases show how highly the Chosön dynasty kings prized Chinese investiture and how aware the Chinese were of the leverage they possessed through the granting or withholding of it.

Items on the tribute list

It became clear after several years of tribute trade that the levy of gold tribute, and, to a lesser extent, of silver tribute, was more than the Koreans could supply. Korea produced little gold and silver domestically, but the tribute levy often ran to hundreds of ounces each year. In 1383, when the Ming ordered the Koreans to submit 500 *chin* of gold and 50,000 ounces of silver, the Koryö court successfully negotiated to have horses substituted for part of the silver levy, but such substitutions were the exception. In 1409 king T'aejong asked the Ming court to allow regular substitutions.²⁵ It is said that the emperor's refusal forced T'aejong to resort to intensive searches of Korean homes in order to raise the required amount of precious metals.²⁶ King Sejong repeated the appeal when he took the throne in 1418, again without

²⁴ *Ming shih lu* (Taipei, 1964); *Wu-tsung shih lu*, 33, p. 3.

²⁵ *Chosön wangjo sillok*, *T'aejong sillok*, 17, p. 4b.

²⁶ Yi Hyön-jong, "Tae-Myöng kwan'gye," p. 333.

success. A third proposal to substitute valuable Korean paper for precious metals likewise failed. By 1425, the Koreans were melting down Buddhist temple objects to obtain the needed gold and envoys had to buy gold from Chinese merchants when they got to Peking. There were even plans to buy it in Japan.²⁷

Finally, in 1429, the tribute list underwent a thorough revision. Gold and silver were eliminated as tribute items, while larger quantities of ginseng, linen, woven mats, and hemp cloth were deemed acceptable by certain recipients on certain occasions. At New Year's the Koreans were ordered to offer tribute to the emperor, empress dowager, empress, and heir apparent. On the emperor's birthday they were to bring tribute for all but the heir apparent. The third embassy, in the autumn, was to present tribute only to the emperor.²⁸

Human tribute

Without doubt, the most demoralizing problem in Ming-Korean relations was the continuation of the traffic in human beings – human tribute – which was started under the Yüan dynasty. On an irregular basis, the imperial court would requisition children for the palace: girls for the harem and boys to be eunuchs. The number of persons requisitioned at any one time was usually small, but the trade itself is what mattered, and the Korean records bear witness to the bitterness with which the Koreans looked upon it. No other aspect of the tributary relationship so clearly demonstrated the abjectness of the Koreans' submission to the Chinese emperor or the contempt in which the Chinese held their loyal neighbors.

Some of the young men who were taken to China as human tribute did well there. As eunuchs, for example, they sometimes had responsibilities which took them back to their homeland. This was not necessarily a pleasant thing. Korean-born Ming eunuchs were notoriously rude to their hosts in Korea; their relatives, shamed by the stigma surrounding eunuchs, did not receive them well either. The eunuchs could not offer their families much, for while a Korean official serving in the Chinese bureaucracy might have found positions for his relatives, eunuchs were not usually in a position to dispense honorable appointments.

Young women fared better if they were chosen for the imperial harem because their natal families acquired prestige in Korea and their male relatives enjoyed privileged positions. In China some of them became important at

27 *Chosŏn wangjo sillok, Sejong sillok*, 40, pp. 26b–27.

28 Suematsu, *Raimatsu senshōni okeru tai Min kankai*, pp. 178–81.

consorts. For example, Toghön Temür (1320–70) the last Yüan emperor, had a Korean concubine, lady Ki (Chinese: Ch'i), who earned the rank of second empress by bearing him an heir. The Hung-wu emperor's Korean concubine, lady Han, bore him at least one daughter, and there has long been speculation that the Yung-lo emperor himself was the son of another Korean concubine, lady Kung.²⁹ The occasional prominence of Korean women as imperial consorts naturally was a positive element in Sino-Korean relations. On the whole, however, most Koreans were outraged by the idea of human tribute and considered it a violation of basic Confucian principles, the more so because the women involved were selected from families with respectable lineages.

Requisitions for Korean women as tribute items were most frequent in the period from 1408 to 1433.³⁰ Until 1424 the requisitions were for young girls exclusively, primarily as candidates for the imperial harem. Selection of the women was an elaborate process. In 1408, for example, the Ming court sent the eunuch Huang Yen to Seoul to organize a countrywide search for suitable candidates between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. More than 200 girls were brought to the Kyöngbok Palace for a first round of inspection. Of these, Huang Yen chose forty-four for a second round. In the final round he chose five, all daughters of the low-to-middle-grade officials. In a special palace ceremony they were given Chinese costumes and court titles. Their male relatives were also given titles. The veritable records of the Chosön dynasty, recording the proceedings in detail, recount that when Huang Yen set off for China with the girls, their brothers were allowed to accompany them as escorts. Lamentations were composed and the sound of their families' wailing filled the streets of the city.³¹ Most of these women never saw Korea again, and some were even reported to have committed suicide when the Yung-lo emperor died, to follow him into the next life.³²

After 1424, the Chinese diversified their demands for women to include entertainers, cooks, and servants. In 1426, eleven women were sent to China with Yun Pong, a Korean eunuch who frequently served as a Ming envoy to Korea; Yun took 33 more the following year. Thereafter, the women taken to China were exclusively entertainers and kitchen servants. The importation of Koreans ended altogether in 1433, and the *Official history of the Ming*

29 Li Chin-hua, "Ming Ch'eng-tsu sheng mu wen t'i hui cheng," *Academia Sinica Bulletin of History and Philology*, 6, No. 1 (1936), pp. 55–77; and Fu Ssu-nien, "Pa 'Ming Ch'eng-tsu sheng mu wen t'i hui cheng," *Academia Sinica Bulletin of History and Philology*, 6, No. 1 (1936), pp. 79–86.

30 Wang Ch'ung-wu, "Ming Ch'eng-tsu Ch'ao-hsien hsüan fei k'ao," *Academia Sinica Bulletin of History and Philology*, 17 (1948), pp. 165–76.

31 *Chosön wangjo sillok*, *T'aejong sillok*, 16, pp. 38–39.

32 *Chosön wangjo sillok*, *Sejong sillok*, 26, p. 15b.

records that the emperor Ying-tsung actually repatriated fifty-three Korean women in 1436 (Korean sources say 1435).³³

MING-KOREAN RELATIONS DURING HIDEYOSHI'S INVASIONS

From the early decades of the Chosŏn dynasty, after the pirate raids along Korea's coasts subsided, Korean-Japanese relations came to consist of limited trade in southeastern Korea and semi-official communication through the So, the hereditary daimyō family of Tsushima. Japanese merchants took up residence at Ungch'ŏn, Tongnae, and Ulsan. A treaty, made in 1443, established rules for trade which generally kept contact to a low level. From time to time Japanese traders presented goods to the king in Seoul and received gifts in exchange, and prior to 1460 several Korean embassies visited the Japanese *bakufu*. But aside from these, the only significant contacts occurred between Korea and Tsushima.

Japanese-Korean relations followed an uneventful pattern until Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98) unified Japan in 1590. Once he had achieved undisputed lordship over Japan, Hideyoshi demanded Korean assistance for his armies in his next campaign, which was to attack the Ming by way of Korea.³⁴ King Sŏnjo (1552–1609; r. 1567–1608), astonished at Hideyoshi's audacity, refused and urged him instead to abandon his scheme on the grounds of morality and common sense. When this had no effect, the Korean court became divided over whether or not Hideyoshi was bluffing. Envoys dispatched to determine his intentions likewise could not agree and filed contradictory reports. At length the court chose to conclude that Hideyoshi was bluffing and failed to take military precautions against him. Thus, Korea was caught unprepared when Japanese armies landed at Pusan in May 1592.

The Japanese invasion force consisted of about 150,000 men in divisions of 18,000 to 20,000. A division under Konishi Yukinaga (ca. 1558–1600)³⁵ was first to land at Pusan, followed by a second under Katō Kiyomasa (1562–1611) and others in succession. The Koreans put up a spirited, if doomed, defense, and the battle of Pusan was over quickly. From this foothold on the peninsula the Japanese advanced north toward Seoul along three routes, overcoming all Korean opposition, including the cream of the Korean

33 *MS*, 320, p. 8285; *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, *Sejong sillok*, 68, pp. 8b–9b, gives a full account of their life in Chinese service.

34 For a discussion of Hideyoshi's vision of a mainland empire see Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), pp. 206–17. The text of Hideyoshi's letter of 1590 to king Sŏnjo appears in Yoshi S. Kuno, *Japanese expansion on the Asiatic continent* (Berkeley, 1937), Vol. 1, pp. 302–03. See also *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. F. W. Mote and D. Twitchett, pp. 567–74.

35 *DMB*, pp. 728–33.

army, at the battle of Ch'ungju. When news of this defeat reached Seoul, king Sŏnjo's ministers panicked and persuaded him to flee the capital for the safety of P'yŏng-yang, well to the north. The Japanese met little organized resistance as they entered Seoul by the various routes they had used and occupied it in the middle of June 1592.

One reason behind the Koreans' gross underestimation of Hideyoshi's determination and skill was a factional struggle in the Korean court. The delegation sent to determine Hideyoshi's intentions in 1590 had included members of both the factions who were in and those who were out of power at court. The members of the delegation from the faction that was out of power argued that the government should shore up Korea's feeble defenses, while those from the faction in power argued that Korea's defenses were already adequate. Political motives influenced this decision, the outcome of which proved the faction out of power to have been correct.

Military errors also contributed to the rout of Korea's forces. For example, Sin Ip (1546–92), foremost of king Sŏnjo's generals, had argued that the Koreans should wait until the Japanese landed before resisting, since an attempt to resist at sea would fail in the face of superior Japanese seamanship. His own command mistakes, however, helped nullify the Koreans' advantage in defending their home ground. General Sin himself was killed in the battle of Ch'ungju. With their land forces crumbling, king Sŏnjo's advisors began to suggest that the court should retreat to the north and appeal to the Ming for intervention.

As king Sŏnjo was leaving Seoul, he named his son, Yi Hŏn (Kwanghaegun, 1575–1641; r. 1608–23),³⁶ heir apparent and assigned him to defend Hamgyŏng province in northeastern Korea. Katō Kiyomasa followed the prince into Hamgyŏng after passing through Seoul, while Konishi Yukinaga pursued the main force to P'yŏng-yang, forcing king Sŏnjo to flee once more, this time to Ŭiju on the Yalu River.³⁷ The Japanese advance slowed after it passed Seoul and stopped altogether at P'yŏng-yang. Bad weather, over-extended supply lines, inadequate communications, and rear-guard actions by local Korean militia and naval forces combined to halt Konishi Yukinaga at the Taedong River. In the northeast, Katō experienced similar difficulties, which were exacerbated by the rough terrain.

Of the various forms of resistance put up by the Koreans, the best organized and most effective was the naval campaign of Admiral Yi Sun-sin (1545–98) in the bays and inlets of the southeastern Korean coastline during

³⁶ DMB, pp. 1591–94.

³⁷ Ki-baik Lee, *A new history of Korea*, trans. Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Shultz (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 209–15.

the summer of 1592. Admiral Yi had experimented with naval architecture prior to the invasion and had developed a type of attack vessel called the “turtle ship,” an oar-driven warship with a metal roof to protect the decks from projectiles and incendiary arrows.³⁸ The turtle ship was apparently larger than most of the Japanese warships, which in many cases were not naval vessels at all but rather coastal transports and fishing boats pressed into temporary service. The turtle ship was equipped with cannon, and its lines were carefully designed for maximum speed and maneuverability so that, despite its size, the Japanese had trouble outrunning it and had virtually no way to trap and board it. By the time the Japanese landed at Pusan, Admiral Yi had constructed a number of these vessels and was able to block Hideyoshi’s attempts that summer to send supplies around the Korean peninsula through the Yellow Sea to Konishi at P’yŏng-yang. In his first three engagements, it is reported that Yi sank nearly a hundred Japanese vessels. In the great Battle of Hansan Island in July 1592, only fourteen of seventy Japanese ships escaped capture or destruction. The significance of the Battle of Hansan Island lies in its effect upon the Japanese high command, which decided thereafter to continue supplying Konishi and Katō over the difficult land routes instead of trying to reach the west coast by sea. This greatly diminished the ability of the Japanese army to advance to the Chinese border.

At Ŭiju, the king’s councillors debated about whether to ask for reinforcements from the Ming. For a time in July 1592, king Sŏnjo himself contemplated taking refuge across the Yalu River in Liao-tung, but instead decided to send an envoy to the Ming capital to request military support. This extraordinary step, made necessary by the emergency, renewed the element of military defense in the Ming-Korean tributary relationship; it led to Ming military intervention without which Korea probably would have been conquered by Hideyoshi’s armies.

The Ming response initially was not enthusiastic. There were questions about Korean good faith, since a party of Ming border officials had reported their suspicion that the Japanese could not have advanced so rapidly without Korean connivance. However, with the fall of P’yŏng-yang on 21 July 1592, the issue ceased to be assistance for Korea and became instead a matter of defending the Ming border. Although the Koreans were refusing Japanese demands to open a route to the Yalu River, the Chinese knew that the frontier was in imminent danger.

The Ming government, therefore, readied its forces for intervention in Korea. As Konishi regrouped at P’yŏng-yang over the summer of 1592, a

³⁸ For a description of the vessel, see Horace H. Underwood, “Korean boats and ships,” *Transactions of the Korea branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 23 (1934), pp. 71–84.

Chinese vanguard of 3,000 troops from Liao-tung crossed into Korea. This unit was badly beaten in its first contact with the Japanese at P'yŏng-yang late in August. In September the Chinese government organized a much larger force under the command of Li Ju-sung (1549–98)³⁹ for a full-scale counter invasion.

The Ming government had meanwhile decided to negotiate as well, in the hope that a bargain could be struck to ensure the security of the border with Korea, albeit perhaps at Korea's expense. Shen Wei-ching (1540?–97?), the representative of minister of war Shih Hsing (1538–99), met at P'yŏng-yang with Konishi Yukinaga to discuss terms. Neither side would give ground. Shen demanded a complete Japanese withdrawal from Korea; Konishi demanded that the Ming emperor acknowledge his status as Hideyoshi's vassal.

A truce, declared to enable Shen to consult his government, allowed both sides to rebuild their strength. When Shen returned with nothing new to offer, the fighting resumed. In February 1593, an army of 36,000 troops under Li Ju-sung (1549–98), together with Korean forces under Yi Il (1538–1601), laid siege to P'yŏng-yang causing heavy losses and forcing Konishi to abandon the city. Instead of pursuing Konishi, however, Li Ju-sung let him retreat, giving him time to gather reinforcements so that Konishi was able to defeat Li, in turn, three weeks later at the battle of Pyŏkchegwan, near Seoul. After this battle, neither side could gain a decisive advantage and, in the spring, the armies stopped fighting. The Japanese pulled back to the southeastern part of the peninsula in May, after which the Ming forces under Li Ju-sung withdrew from Korea altogether. With the serious fighting ended, king Sŏnjo returned to his capital.

During the lull in the war, Ming representatives began a new series of negotiations with Hideyoshi which lasted into 1596. Meanwhile, Korean militia units and disaffected peasants continually skirmished with the Japanese in the southern part of the peninsula. The Japanese were obliged to use overwhelming force to maintain their position in the area. For example, the Japanese capture of the city of Chinju, one of the bloodiest episodes of the entire war, reportedly cost the lives of 60,000 soldiers and townspeople.

The Chinese struck a bargain of sorts with Hideyoshi in 1593, but its terms were misunderstood on both sides.⁴⁰ At issue was Hideyoshi's investiture as ruler of Japan, and his possession of all or part of the Korean peninsula. The original documents may have stipulated a quid pro quo arrangement; but the documents presented by the returning Ming envoys in Peking indi-

³⁹ DMB, pp. 830–35.

⁴⁰ Kuno, *Japanese expansion on the Asiatic continent*, Vol. 1, pp. 167–68, and pp. 328–32.

cated that Hideyoshi was willing to withdraw from Korea altogether and to acknowledge his status as a vassal of the Ming emperor. However, when the Ming court eventually dispatched a delegation to Japan to invest Hideyoshi in 1596, the envoys discovered Japanese troops still remained in south Korea. In Japan, Hideyoshi was incensed by the condescending language of the Ming documents granting him vassal king status, and the mission was a total failure. Hideyoshi realized that nothing had been achieved by his Korean campaign.

Early in 1597, Hideyoshi ordered a second invasion of Korea by a force of 140,000 troops, again under the command of Konishi Yukinaga and Katō Kiyomasa. The second invasion did not get as far as the first one had, but the fighting between Japanese and Sino-Korean forces in southern Korea was no less violent. Late in 1597, Hideyoshi's troops were firmly entrenched at Ulsan, Sach'ŏn, and Sunch'ŏn, and had successfully repelled all Sino-Korean attempts to dislodge them. The fresh troops from Japan did well against the Ming army, which suffered from serious supply problems. Although the defenders ostensibly were under joint Sino-Korean command, in practice, the Ming officers commanded. There were bitter disagreements between Chinese and Korean leaders. The Chinese criticized the Koreans' combat performance while disagreeing with the Koreans about whether to fight or to negotiate. One Ming officer went so far as to accuse the Koreans of using the Japanese to help them retake part of Liao-tung, a charge which the Chinese actually investigated and then dismissed.⁴¹

Hideyoshi died in September 1598. During the summer his troops in Korea had encountered stronger resistance from Sino-Korean forces under the Ming commanders Liu Ting (ca. 1550–1619)⁴² and Tung I-Yüan. In November, his successors ordered a complete withdrawal of Japanese forces from the Korean peninsula. At the time, the Japanese were engaged in combat at several points in southern Korea, and the Sino-Korean forces were in no mood to permit an orderly retreat. The Japanese evacuation afforded the defenders the opportunity to attack at sea off the southern coast, where many Chinese and Korean ships were already in position for the attack. The most important naval engagement of 1598 took place when Konishi tried to embark his troops at Sunch'ŏn with protection from a Japanese fleet based at Pusan. The Sino-Korean ships under Ch'en Lin (d. 1607)⁴³ met the incoming Japanese force in the battle of the Noryang Straits. At first, the Japanese held their own, defeating the left division of the fleet under Teng Tzu-lung

41 Gari K. Ledyard, "The Korean security crisis of 1598: National security Confucian style." Paper presented before the Columbia University Seminar on Korea (December, 1980), pp. 19ff.

42 *DMB*, p. 966.

43 *DMB*, pp. 167–74.

and entrapping Ch'en Lin's central division. But then, the Korean admiral Yi Sun-sin, seeing Ch'en's predicament, sailed in to effect a successful rescue. Although Admiral Yi died in the battle, his men went on to inflict devastating losses on the retreating Japanese.

After the war, the Ming government rewarded Ch'en Lin for the destruction of more than 300 Japanese vessels in this last series of engagements. Koreans, however, recall that suspicion and treachery clouded the relationships between Chinese and Korean commanders at the time, and they assert that Yi Sun-sin deserves the credit for defeating Konishi's forces in the end, for it was he and his men who saved Ch'en Lin at the Noryang Straits.

Japanese forces had completely withdrawn from Korea by 1599. The Chinese, fearing renewed attacks, occupied selected positions until 1601, when they, too, withdrew. The war was utterly futile. Japanese historians generally recognize Hideyoshi's folly in undertaking the conquest of China. Yet, the war had far-reaching effects: it drained the Ming treasury and the diverted Ming forces assigned to control the Jurchen in Manchuria. The first invasion in 1592–93 was countered by more than 200,000 Ming troops and cost an estimated 10 million taels of silver. Similar costs attended Ming defense efforts in 1598.⁴⁴ This burden on state revenues, when added to the cost of constructing the Wan-li emperor's tomb and rebuilding the residential palaces in the Forbidden City, weakened the government's defenses throughout the realm. At the same time, the Manchu leader Nurhaci was organizing his banner men in Manchuria, looking ahead to the conquest of China proper. Hideyoshi's war in Korea, therefore, did contribute to the fall of the Ming, but not in the way he had intended.

The effects of the war on Korea were of a different kind. In one sense, the defense of Korea was a success because the Japanese were confined to the southern provinces and eventually withdrew. The cost of this success, however, was incalculable. The political control of the Chosŏn dynasty was weakened and conflict among factions at court intensified. The Koreans felt that they owed a debt to the Ming court, which they tried to repay in subsequent years by resisting the Manchus, only to be punished by Abahai's invasions in 1627 and 1636. Korea's economic system suffered the simultaneous disruption of agriculture, markets, and the tax and land tenure systems. Korean society had to endure the destruction of families, an increase in vagrancy and banditry, the suffering of displaced persons, and great social upheaval.

During the war, it was sometimes hard for the Koreans to tell the difference between their Japanese enemies and their Chinese allies. Ming troops killed

44 Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, *East Asia: The great tradition* (Boston, 1960), pp. 332–33.

Korean civilians in order to inflate body counts. Both armies took from the Koreans whatever they could carry and burned much that was not portable, so that whole towns were lost along with some of Korea's finest buildings. Korea lost artisans, particularly potters, who were taken to Japan and put to work. Libraries, type fonts, paintings, scrolls, and countless religious and secular artifacts were taken as booty. Even Neo-Confucianism was a wartime acquisition, transmitted to Japan by Kang Hang, a captured Korean scholar. Thus, Korea's defense was successful only in the military sense. The only real beneficiaries of the war were Nurhaci in Manchuria and Tokugawa Ieyasu, whose position within Japan was strengthened by the weakening of the daimyō of western Japan who had invested most in supporting Hideyoshi's Korean campaign.

KOREA AND THE FALL OF THE MING

After 1600, Korea's relations with Ming China were determined by the debt which the Koreans felt they owed for the assistance provided by the Chinese during Hideyoshi's invasions, and by the rise of Nurhaci and his armies on Korea's northern border. King Kwanghae, king Sōnjo's successor, was constantly under pressure from domestic political factions. He had to choose between loyalty to a declining Ming overlord or to a threatening barbarian neighbor. As had been the case in the late fourteenth century, events proved that the attempt to remain on good terms with both was impractical. When the Korean court, in a state of considerable political turmoil, chose to support the Ming, another round of invasions ensued. This time retribution was visited on Korea by the Manchus, descendants of the Chien-chou Jurchen.⁴⁵

Kwanghae postponed this fateful choice as long as he could, but in 1619 the Ming government called on him to join in Yang Hao's Liao-tung campaign against Nurhaci. The Koreans dutifully supplied a division of 10,000 men which fought at the battle of Sarhū under the command of Kang Hong-nip (1560–1627). Kang, however, had orders to hold back and surrender if things went badly, as they did, and to explain to the Manchus that Korean participation in the campaign was a political necessity only. At the time, the Manchus were more interested in the Chinese than in the Koreans, so Kang and his men were allowed to return home without incident.

Nevertheless, Korea could not forego a commitment indefinitely. In 1623, after the Manchus had taken Liao-tung, king Kwanghae's court was bitterly divided over the king's lukewarm attitude toward the Ming. Once again the

45 Gari K. Ledyard, "Yin and yang in the China-Manchuria-Korea triangle." In *China among equals: The middle kingdom and its neighbors, 101b–141b centuries*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 328–30.

presence of this issue affected the outcome of a political struggle, and king Kwanghae was overthrown.

When the Manchus took Liao-tung and blocked the overland route between Korea and Ming China in 1621, a Chinese general named Mao Wen-lung (1576–1629)⁴⁶ escaped to Korea with a small force and set up a base on Kado Island just south of the Yalu estuary. From this base he organized forays into Liao-tung and enjoyed surprising success in his attacks on the Manchus. Mao was supplied directly from Shantung by Ming ships, and his years of activity from a Korean base helped convince the Manchus that Korea would have to be subdued by force. Mao Wen-lung, therefore, is credited with having given the Manchus an important reason to invade the peninsula in 1627. That invasion, repeated in 1636 after the Koreans tried again to avoid accepting the status of vassal to the Ch'ing, effectively ended the official Ming-Korean relationship.

For Koreans as for many Chinese, Manchu rule was a bitter humiliation. Long after the Manchus had conquered China and the Korean court had resigned itself to paying tribute to the Ch'ing emperor, the people of Korea maintained a certain formal distance from the Manchus and remembered the Ming with a special kind of admiration. Correct tributary relations with the Ch'ing were offset by symbolic reservations: Korean officials in the government at Hanyang kept using the Ming calendar in dating internal documents, wearing Ming costumes and observing Ming court rituals. Along the border with China strict rules against habitation in a no-man's-land helped prevent Koreans from mixing with their neighbors on the Chinese side. Tribute envoys plied the route to Peking as regularly as they had during the Ming dynasty, trading and keeping detailed diaries. The Chosŏn court used tribute to purchase noninterference by the Ch'ing court, and chose to live in quiet isolation until the Japanese opened the peninsula with the Treaty of Kanghai in 1876.⁴⁷

46 Arthur W. Hummel, comp., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period* (Washington, DC, 1943), pp. 567–68.

47 For a discussion of the effect of the Japanese treaty on the Sino-Korean tributary relationship see Mary C. Wright, "The adaptability of Ch'ing diplomacy: The case of Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 17, No. 3 (May 1958), pp. 363–81.

CHAPTER 6

MING FOREIGN RELATIONS: SOUTHEAST ASIA

The rulers of Ming China would not have recognized the region known today as Southeast Asia. They considered the archipelago east of Brunei (modern Borneo) to be part of that area they termed the Eastern Oceans, while all other coastal states they considered part of the Western Oceans, which, for long periods in their nomenclature, also included countries bordering on the Indian Ocean. Those states which comprised what are now modern Burma, Laos, and northern Thailand, were grouped quite differently from the other nations comprising the Eastern or Western Oceans.

The view of other nations held at the imperial capital at Nanking or Peking was always sinocentric. Foreign countries were considered to have no meaningful existence unless their rulers had a relationship with the emperor of China. Such factors as the country's distance from China's capital, whether the country shared a border with the empire or not, and whether the country was important to the empire's defense were also deemed significant. There were held to be technical differences between nations as well: countries which sent missions through Ch'üan-chou in Fukien were distinguished by the court from countries whose missions entered China through Canton in Kwangtung; and countries sending overland missions from beyond the provinces of Kwangsi and Yunnan were considered yet different again from the others. Certain general principles concerning the proper conduct of foreign relations that the Chinese court continually emphasized notwithstanding, what remained most important in determining Chinese foreign policy toward Southeast Asia were the political conditions prevailing at the particular time during the dynasty.

During the first sixty years of Ming rule, Yüan precedents and lessons learned from Yüan policies and their records were decisive in shaping foreign policy; so, too, were the attitudes and fears of the new elites from Central China who had founded the Ming, particularly with respect to the Mongols. Along the coast, problems of piracy and the unresolved governmental issue of whether and under what conditions to permit maritime trade led to restrictions on travel. China experienced problems in her relationships with Vietnam and Champa while these two countries, in turn, suffered difficulties in their

relationship with one another. The need to conquer Yunnan, which remained under the control of the Mongolian Prince of Liang until 1382,¹ and troubles along the southwestern borders with Burma and Laos also shaped foreign policy. Finally, the expeditions of the eunuch admiral, Cheng Ho (1371–1433), and the impact they had on Southeast Asia affected foreign policy. After about 1435, however, the court gradually lost interest in the south. When the imperial capital was removed to Peking in the early fifteenth century, contacts with countries in Southeast Asia and beyond became infrequent. Except for a few decades during the sixteenth century when the Japanese, assisted by Chinese pirates, raided along the South Chinese coast, foreign policy focused entirely on northern defenses. The arrival of the Europeans added a new dimension to maritime trade, but did little to change Ming attitudes with respect to foreign relations with the countries of the south.

Ming records indicate that the court concentrated up to the middle of the fifteenth century on relations with Southeast Asia. The reign of the first emperor saw the encouragement of formal tributary relations with Southeast Asian nations, but saw also, in contradistinction, attempts to limit the extent of foreign contacts. During the Yung-lo reign, however, a new flurry of activity was recorded. Secondary literature also supports this picture of increased activity. Modern scholarship on the first sixty years of the dynasty has been enriched by the almost universal interest in Cheng Ho's naval expeditions through Southeast Asia to the coasts of the Indian Ocean. In addition, the Ming invasion and administration of Vietnam for twenty years has added volumes to the major sources and the secondary writings that provide information on foreign relations during this period. After the 1430s, however, primary sources are relatively silent about Ming relations with the southern kingdoms. Although foreign merchants and traders on the China coast sought counterparts in Kwangtung and Fukien with whom to trade, these contacts were officially recorded only on those occasions when they posed a threat to imperial interests or infringed on established policies.

The first Ming emperor was particularly concerned to learn from the Yüan dynasty's policies and their results. The Mongols had attacked the southwestern kingdom of Ta-li from eastern Tibet and had threatened Vietnam as part of their preparation for the conquest of the Southern Sung dynasty. After they conquered the Sung, the Mongols demanded submission from the rulers

1 For the Ming conquest of Yunnan, see John Langlois, "The Hung-wu reign." In *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part I*, Vol. 7, eds. Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China* (New York, 1988), pp. 143–46.

of Vietnam, Burma, the Tai states,² Champa, and even Java. When these rulers did not respond with sufficient respect, the Mongols invaded their countries. These aggressive policies were abandoned after the death of the emperor Khubilai (r. 1260–94). Neither these aggressive policies nor the Yüan policy of encouraging maritime trade appealed to the founder of the Ming dynasty. Private trade had been uncontrolled and had become intermingled with the tributary trade of the court. This, in the Ming emperor's view, had given rise to the unrest and instability along the coastal frontiers that he inherited along with his throne.

Yüan policies towards the southern kingdoms had been predicated on the assumption that the dynasty faced no threats along its northern frontiers. The Yüan rulers could thus afford to threaten southern rulers and to extend their power as far south as was feasible. The first Ming emperor, however, found himself in the opposite position: he faced danger from the north.³ He needed to secure his southern and coastal frontiers so that he could concentrate on pacifying the great Mongolian-Turkic confederations to the north and on defending the long northern border between western Manchuria and eastern Tibet. He could not afford to fight his southern neighbors at the same time.

In this situation, the strategic position of the Ming dynasty was comparable to that of the Han, T'ang, and Sung dynasties. The first Ming emperor's advisors urged him to look to the historical record of these earlier dynasties for solutions. He had been persuaded to look to the past for models for most aspects of his empire-building, and his policies relating to nations to the south of China were no exception. He revived both the earlier sinocentric rhetoric of foreign relations as well as many of the ancient ceremonies that his Han, T'ang, and Sung predecessors had used for dealing with tribute missions from vassal states. His policies differed markedly from those of the Yüan in that he avoided displays of force, demands for submission, and attempts to assert indirect control over vassal states. He sought, instead, to obtain their symbolic acknowledgement of China's cosmological centrality and their acknowledgement that his succession to power was legitimate.

2 I have used Shan-Lao-Tai states to describe kingdoms or tribal territories in Burma, Laos, northern Thailand, and Yunnan that were not under the control of Ayuthia (that is, Hsien-lo or Siam). For the rulers of Ayuthia, I have used Thai or Siamese. Strictly speaking Tai is now used for speakers of the Tai language in Yunnan, but during the Ming, the line between the Tai, the Shan, and the Lao was not too clear. Nevertheless, it would be clearer if I used Thai only for those who ruled Ayuthia or were ruled by Ayuthia.

3 For a fuller analysis of the first Ming emperor's policies, see Wang Gungwu, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: a background essay." In *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 34–36, 50–53.

The first Ming emperor was clearly aware that conditions under the Ming dynasty differed also from those that had prevailed under dynasties earlier than the Yüan. Unlike the Han emperors, Kao-tsu (r. 206–195 BCE) and Wu-ti (r. 140–87 BCE), the first Ming emperor inherited a South China that was already populous and plagued by serious problems of coastal defense. Unlike the first T'ang emperor and his famous son, T'ai-tsung (r. 626–49), the first Ming emperor was not an aristocratic professional soldier from the northwest who moved easily and confidently among the nomadic horsemen from the steppes and their fierce tribal leaders. For the first Ming emperor, the steppe remained alien and hostile. In addition, unlike the Chao brothers who founded the Sung dynasty, he controlled the whole length of the Great Wall line. The Ming dynasty was never handicapped as the Sung dynasty had been by having its greatest enemies entrenched on Chinese territory. Therefore, the first Ming emperor could not depend entirely on earlier models, but had to be innovative in his defense plans and foreign policies, even with respect to his peaceful southern neighbors. He had to evaluate, almost from first principles, how to deal with overland neighbors in the southwest beyond Kwangsi and Yunnan, and with overseas neighbors whose ships could enter the ports of Kwangtung and Fukien.

His first communications with the southern kingdoms were sent early in 1369 and were essentially announcements both of his victory over the Mongols and of the establishment of a legitimate new dynasty.⁴ It is noteworthy that this proclamation was sent to Korea and Vietnam on the same day and then, a month later, to Champa, Java, Hsi-yang (South India), and Japan. By that time, Champa had already sent its first mission to China, being the first state in Southeast Asia to do so. Also, it was discovered that the last Javanese envoy to the Yüan court was still in Fukien when the Yüan dynasty fell, so the Ming envoy to Java escorted him home. Vietnam responded quickly to the announcement, but its king died soon after sending a mission to the Ming court. The emperor was solicitous and, after observing a ritual period of mourning, confirmed the deceased monarch's nephew as the successor.

In all these cases, tradition was stressed: normal relations were resumed, it was claimed, after a century of aberration under the rule of the Mongolian Yüan dynasty. The key features of the Ming court's method of conducting foreign policy during this period were the use of an established, conventional rhetoric and the restoration of proper rituals: these restored rituals included those related to the presentation of tributary gifts, the bestowal of imperial

⁴ *MSL, T'ai-tsu shih-lu*, pp. 36–47.

gifts in return, the enfeoffment of foreign kings, and even those used to provide gifts of the new Ming calendar. The rituals were elaborate but did not demand actual submission to imperial control. Degrees of symbolic submission were later worked out in detail, but even these took account of what the Ming court thought were conventions acceptable to the rulers receiving and sending envoys. Yet, there was at least one new feature which went beyond T'ang and Sung practice in Southeast Asia.

In ancient times, the emperor, as Son of Heaven, sacrificed to the Five Sacred Mountains and Four Sacred Rivers as part of his ritual duties at the capital. Symbolically, this meant that his imperial reach extended to all the territories around the Mountains and Rivers, that is, "all under Heaven." Later, temples were built at the Mountains and officials were sent to perform the sacrifices. By T'ang and Sung times, sacrifices could be made at local altars by prefectural and county officials, or at the capital, or by central officials sent out to perform the rituals. The Ming founder went further, however, and added twenty-one mountains, six rivers and six minor rivers of Vietnam and three mountains and four rivers of Korea to the empire's list, with places to receive sacrifices. He even abstained from meat, composed congratulatory messages, and sent officials to perform sacrifices at the sites themselves. He further included Champa. A few years later, he added the Ryukyus. After that, however, his ministers advised him not to sacrifice to these foreign mountains and rivers personally and at the capital, but to have the acts delegated to specific provinces. For example, Kwangsi sacrifices were to include the mountains and rivers of Vietnam, Champa, Cambodia, Siam, and South India; Kwangtung sacrifices were to include those of Śrīvijaya and Java; Fukien sacrifices, those of Japan, the Ryukyus, and Brunei; Liaotung (Manchuria) sacrifices would include those of Korea; and Shensi sacrifices were to include those of Kansu, and Eastern and Western Tibet. Differences were specified to be made, however, between sacrifices offered to those mountains and rivers within the empire and the sacrifices offered to the mountains and rivers outside it. Although merely a symbolic practice introduced for the apparently benevolent reason of wishing to ensure the longevity and security of these kings and the lasting prosperity of their lands, this registration and sacrificing implied a measure of cosmic, imperial responsibility over these lands which had never been so clearly claimed before.⁵

Behind the rituals, however, was a reality which could not be disguised by rhetoric of harmony and prosperity: Vietnam and Champa continually fought with one another, a Mongolian prince still governed Yunnan, there was con-

5 MSL, *T'ai-tsu shih-lu*, pp. 47, 48.

siderable unrest among the tribal principalities along Yunnan's borders, and there were political upheavals among the countries in the region of the Java Sea and the Straits of Malacca. The first Ming emperor soon discovered that he had to become involved in the first and the second of these conflicts, and his empire was eventually touched by the ramifications of the third conflict.

Indeed, for the rest of the Ming period, the region now called Southeast Asia posed at least four different problems to the Ming court, each of which determined certain aspects of the dynasty's foreign relations in the south. These problems may be summarized as follows.

First, the relations between Vietnam and Champa, which ended in the Vietnamese conquest of Champa, developed into hostile relations between Vietnam and Cambodia, and later led to Vietnam's rivalry with Thailand. Although these conflicts took place away from Vietnam's borders with China, they nevertheless created problems for Ming China's policies toward Southeast Asia.

Second, there were special problems in China's relations with Vietnam. These problems, while related to the hostilities between Vietnam and its neighbors, largely concerned the frontiers between China and Vietnam as well as Vietnam's policies towards tribal territories to its west and to Ming China's south. The failure of Ming China to absorb Vietnam into the empire was an event of great significance in the history of mainland Southeast Asia.

Third, the Ming empire's maritime activities, both military and commercial, involved the littoral states of the South China Sea, from Luzon to Thailand and the Champa ports; but they also involved countries beyond the Straits of Malacca and, for a short period in the early fifteenth century, brought various states bordering on the Indian Ocean as far west as Arabia and East Africa into the empire's political sphere of influence. This connection also brought Indian, Persian, and Arab traders into contact with China and opened the southeast coast to the new commercial and political activities of the Portuguese, the Spanish, and the Dutch.

Fourth, the Ming court governed the southwestern states in modern Burma, Laos, and the province of Yunnan through aboriginal offices (*ʼu-ssu*). This administrative system was a legacy of the Yüan, which was established when the Mongols incorporated the Nanchao kingdom of Ta-li into their empire as an imperial province. One other development that occurred just before the Ming dynasty was founded also was significant: along with the Vietnamese and Burmans, the T'ai peoples had also been expanding toward the south. The kingdom of Ayutthaya (Ayudhia) was founded in 1350. It stretched down the Menam valley and combined the Hsien (Syam or Sukothai) state of the north with the ancient Lo-ho (Lopburi) state in the south to form a kingdom known as Hsien-lo in Chinese records.

The region of Southeast Asia only became the object of imperial policy in China following Mongolian emperor Khubilai's expeditions against Ta-li, Burma, Vietnam, Champa, and Java. This dramatic series of events left the region with the shared experience of a power which had never been exerted so extensively in the south before and awakened the kingdoms there to the problems of living with a powerful and potentially aggressive China as their neighbor. Thus, a new Chinese emperor, like the founder of the Ming dynasty who could defeat the Mongols, was a person to be treated with respect. It is in this context that the first Ming emperor's letters to Southeast Asian rulers should be read.

The first Ming emperor's initiatives to seek his neighbors' acknowledgement of his legitimacy may be juxtaposed to his desire to limit all foreign contacts severely. The limits imposed on foreign contacts may have seemed justified in Confucian terms, but the practical reasons were more important. The first Ming emperor believed in tight centralized control over all matters pertaining to relations beyond the borders of his empire. While his main concern was the security of his dynastic house and his empire, he was nonetheless anxious to control all foreign trade so as to ensure that trading along sensitive frontiers would not disturb the law and order of his realm: hence, both the primacy of the formal relations with foreign rulers and the ban on private commerce. This policy did not mean that trading abroad was impossible; it simply made it illegal, secret, and largely unrecorded. The commercial aspects of foreign relations need not concern us here; they are described elsewhere in this volume.⁶ This chapter will focus on the workings of the Ming imperial system as it applied to China's Southeast Asian neighbors.

The immediate purpose behind sending imperial messengers to Southeast Asia with news of the first Ming emperor's accession was to determine quickly which countries wanted close relations with China and which did not, which were dependent and friendly and which were potentially hostile. It soon became clear that, unlike the early Mongolian rulers of the Yüan dynasty, the first Ming emperor was less interested in submission to the Son of Heaven than in a formal acknowledgement of his new dynasty. He concentrated his efforts on a relatively small sphere of geographic influence and consistently tried to restrict the number of tribute missions by adhering to the classical ideal of one mission every three years for closely neighboring countries and one mission every generation for the rest. He encouraged his imperial officials and his successors to be sensitive to the need for the demonstration of adequate respect for the ruler of China as the Son of Heaven;

6 See the chapter "Ming China and the emerging world economy" by William Atwell in this volume, pp. 376–416.

for quickness in responding to border troubles; and for wariness of any linkage between foreign powers and domestic politics. On two other aspects of foreign relations, he laid down explicit policies: countries overseas were not to be attacked; and tribute relations were not to be undertaken for profit and were not to be conflated with private maritime trade.

In all these policies, the emperor was innovative and, indeed, laid the foundations for Chinese relations with Southeast Asian countries for the next five centuries. The innovative aspects of his foreign policy must be explained. His sensitivity about respect for the Son of Heaven appeared conventional, yet his acts were not routine or ritualistic. A sense of moral and political purpose lay behind the missions to and from China. This sense of moral purpose is most evident in the various missions dispatched to Vietnam, a country itself very sensitive to questions of independence and self-respect after a century of delicate relations with the Mongolian rulers of the Yüan dynasty. The first Ming emperor's reign coincided with some troublesome decades for the Trần dynastic house. The first two missions he sent to Vietnam in 1369 arrived while a violent succession dispute was taking place. The Trần emperor Duê-tông had just died and the adopted son of his deceased eldest brother was set on the throne. With great care and elaborate ceremonies, the Ming court officially recognized this succession. Less than a year later, the newly installed emperor was dethroned and executed. The Ming court, however, was not informed of these events. Instead, the new ruler, Nghê-tông, tried to deceive the first Ming emperor, who was understandably incensed when the truth was finally revealed.

The Ming court refused to recognize Nghê-tông. When Nghê-tông gave up his throne two years later to his younger brother Duê-tông, tributary relations were resumed. But relations remained cool as long as Nghê-tông ruled behind the scenes; and neither Duê-tông nor his son, Phe-de, sought a patent of enfeoffment from the Ming emperor. When Phe-de was in turn removed and killed by his cousin, Ho Qui Ly (Lê Qui-ly), the first Ming emperor became even more suspicious and hostile. By 1393 he was again rejecting tribute missions sent by the Vietnamese court. Only the disputes along the empire's border with Vietnam led to the resumption of diplomatic relations during the last three years of the Hung-wu reign (1396–98), and these relations were far from friendly. What angered the emperor most was that this series of usurpations made a mockery of his acts of recognition and enfeoffment, which he saw as the basis of secure relationships. As he put it, when informed of Nghê-tông's (Che Bong Nga's) death in 1396, more than a year after the event:

If we send a mission to show we share the bereavement, that would be supporting the rebellions and conceding to bandits. When others hear of this later, would they not imitate him and would not evil plots then abound? This does not conform with China's principles in dealing with foreign countries.⁷

The first Ming emperor unilaterally resumed diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1395 in a quick response to border troubles, however. When Lung-chou tribesmen rebelled along the southernmost borders of Kwangsi, two missions led by the senior envoys were sent to Vietnam. The finer points of tributary protocol were put aside when problems were seen as serious. By comparison, an earlier dispute along the same border in 1381 was less serious; the emperor angrily ordered the authorities in Kwangsi province to turn back all Vietnamese missions in the future, but, in fact, one was accepted in the following year.⁸

The first Ming emperor was alert concerning the security of his borders, but sought to avoid involvement in the troubles of his neighbors. Imperial correspondence regarding the attacks and counter-attacks between Vietnam and Champa express this approach. The emperor was unwilling to take sides in this bitter quarrel, although five times, during the 1370s, he appealed to both parties to stop fighting. Even when Vietnam was out of favor and Champa had regular access to the Ming court, the emperor never wavered in his principle of strict impartiality. However, if something concerned the security of the empire, the response was different. When the Ming forces needed grain supplies during the campaign in Yunnan in 1384, Vietnam was expected to send the provisions up the Red River to the border. Also, when supplies were again needed to crush the Lung-chou rebels on the Kwangsi border in 1395, Vietnam was expected to deliver supplies to the nearest Ming garrisons. Vietnam could not remain neutral when the Ming court was engaged in pacifying frontier regions close to Vietnam's borders.

The issue of relations between foreign rulers and Ming officials was even more sensitive. Two examples illustrate the emperor's concern that his officials maintain the proper protocol as representatives of the superior power in their dealings with foreign rulers. The first is related to Vietnam, which had long been defiant about its right to be a southern empire equal to China and which was proud of its record of survival against Mongolian coercion. A battle of wills was joined at the start, with the Ming emperor determined to assert his superiority and not allow any challenge to his supreme position in the universe or to the hierarchical relationships it was his duty to maintain.

7 *MSL*, *T'ai-tsu shih-lu*, 244, p. 3547.

8 *MS*, 321, pp. 8309–11; also Chiu Ling-yeong, et al., *Ming shih-lu chung chih Tung-nan-ya shih-liao* (Hong Kong, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 3, 7, 15, 17, 25, 28, 30, 35, 41, 48, 50–51, 56, 60–64.

The strictest protocol was insisted upon. When the official sent to enfeoff the king of Vietnam found that the king had just died, he refused to enter the country to anoint the deceased emperor's successor. The Vietnamese were forced to report the king's death and to request formal recognition of his demise from the Ming emperor himself.

Having put Vietnam in its place, the emperor lavished praise on Ming envoys who had refused to accept any gifts from the Vietnamese ruler, even at the risk of offending him. This action reinforced the principle that the emperor, not his officials, conducted foreign relations and illustrated as well the inferior status of Vietnam, which could only offer tribute, but not bestow gifts, even on Chinese envoys. Indeed, Vietnam's determination to assert some degree of equality in foreign relations was a source of tension with China during the following decades. The Ministry of Rites devised ever more elaborate ceremonies for receiving Vietnam's tribute envoys at the Ming court and for the reception by the Vietnamese of the Ming envoys sent to them from the court. This elaboration reached a point at which the Ming emperor had to restrain the ministry from going too far. At the same time, Vietnam was pressured to forego annual missions and to follow instead the traditional practice of dispatching a mission once every three years, like Champa, Cambodia, and Siam. A decision, made in 1383, to send official tal-lies used to establish a Ming envoy's credentials to Champa, Cambodia, and Siam, but not to Vietnam may have been a further sign of imperial disfavor.⁹

The second notable example concerns relations with San-fo-ch'i kuo (Śrīvijaya), or the Malay world around eastern and central Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Professor O. W. Wolters has examined the background to this Malay connection and has offered a new explanation of the events of the 1370s and late 1390s that affected Ming relations with the Malays.¹⁰ His explanation points out the first Ming emperor's ignorance of, and lack of interest in, the finer points of politics in maritime Southeast Asia. The study also enunciates the complexities of the relationships between sovereigns and vassals in the region: complexities which the Ming court failed to appreciate. Wolters explains persuasively how these local struggles for trade and legitimacy might have involved Ming officials and how they led the first Ming emperor to make humiliating errors and to cause the death of his envoys at the hands of the Javanese. Even if Ming officials had not been plotting with

9 The Ming view of the relationship is drawn from *MSL* and *MS* (see note 7 above). It is interesting to compare it with the Vietnamese view presented in Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Ta Yüeh shih-chi ch'üan-shu* (*Dai Viet su k'ý toan thu*), ed. Ch'en Ching-ho (Tokyo, 1984), Vol. 1, pp. 436–70. Also see John K. Whitmore, *Vietnam, Hồ Quý Ly, and the Ming (1371–1421)*, Yale Southeast Asia Series (New Haven, 1985), pp. 16–36.

10 See O. W. Wolters, *The fall of Śrīvijaya in Malay history* (Ithaca, 1970), and *Early Indonesian commerce: A study of the origins of Śrīvijaya* (Ithaca, 1967).

these foreign rulers, their failure to save the emperor from error aroused his suspicions about them. In particular, he suspected his powerful prime minister, Hu Wei-yung, who was also subsequently accused of having had clandestine relations with both the Japanese and with those responsible for piracy along the whole length of the China coast. The example of the Ningpo commandant, Lin Hsien, confirmed the emperor's suspicions about officials' interference in foreign relations. Lin Hsien had been banished to Japan on Hu Wei-yung's recommendation. He was later brought back, allegedly with 400 armed Japanese warriors, to support a coup attempt by Hu Wei-yung, but it was too late to help Hu. Six years later, Lin was exposed for his part in the treachery and executed. Cases like Lin Hsien's help to explain the emperor's conviction that his officials' relations with foreigners had to be of an absolutely formal nature and tightly controlled.¹¹

Obviously, the emperor's policy was that tributary relations were not to be conducted for profit. The consequences of such restricted relations on international trade are explored elsewhere in this volume. What should be noticed at this point as well, however, was the emperor's explicit policy of refraining from aggression against overseas countries. This striking new feature of an entirely defensive policy towards countries to the south and east cannot be overemphasized. This approach not only confirmed the past practices of the Han, T'ang, and Sung empires and rejected the practices of the Mongolian emperor Khubilai, but it also established an important doctrine of Ming foreign policy.

It is significant that this policy, first enunciated in 1371, then embodied in the first emperor's *Tsu hsün lu* (Ancestral injunctions) promulgated in 1373, was, after revisions, reaffirmed in detail towards the end of his reign in the final version of the *Huang Ming tsu hsün lu*. It was one of the few basic policies from which the first Ming emperor never deviated. Because it was such an extraordinary declaration of policy, it deserves to be quoted in full. The key passage is found in the 1373 version of his instructions to his descendants:

The overseas foreign countries like An-nan [Vietnam], Champa, Korea, Siam, Liu-ch'iu [the Ryūkyū islands], [the countries of the] Western Oceans [South India] and Eastern Oceans [Japan] and the various small countries of the southern *man* [barbarians] are separated from us by mountains and seas and far away in a corner. Their lands would not produce enough for us to maintain them; their peoples would not usefully serve us if incorporated [into the empire]. If they were so unrealistic as to disturb our borders, it would be unfortunate for them. If they gave us no trouble and we moved troops to fight them unnecessarily, it would be unfortunate for us. I am concerned that future generations might abuse China's wealth

11 On Hu Wei-yung's treason, see Langlois, "The Hung-wu reign," pp. 137-42; and p. 155 on the death of Lin Hsien.

and power and covet the military glories of the moment to send armies into the field without reason and cause a loss of life. May they be sharply reminded that this is forbidden. As for the *hu* and *jung* barbarians who threaten China in the north and west, they are always a danger along our frontiers. Good generals must be picked and soldiers trained to prepare carefully against them.¹²

This passage, from the opening section of the *Ancestral injunctions* is retained in the final revised version of 1395. Additions and changes to the later version of this text are of interest, and one, a change in the order of the injunctions, was probably important. In the earlier versions, this passage was the last item in the section, whereas, in the final version, this injunction had been advanced to the position of the fourth most important injunction.

In addition, fifteen countries were designated countries “not to be invaded.” To the three countries in Southeast Asia listed above, seven more were added: Cambodia, Samudra-Pasai (northern Sumatra), Java, Pahang, Pai-hua (Battak or West Java), San-fo-ch’i kuo (Śrīvijaya or Palembang in central and southern Sumatra), and Brunei (Borneo). The inclusion of the last four countries is significant; all four were probably vassals of the Majapahit empire of Java. What is interesting is that the emperor had been aware since 1371 that Brunei was a vassal state of Java and probably, since 1378, that Śrīvijaya was as well. Yet, he insisted on keeping both kingdoms on the list as late as 1395 and did not publicly acknowledge Śrīvijaya as Java’s vassal until 1397.¹³

In the later version, the emperor also discriminated among these countries and indicated that only Cambodia and Siam had untroubled relations with the Ming empire. Vietnam was not favored and was restricted to a mission once every three years. Champa and the rest of the southern countries had deceived the emperor by including private traders in their tributary mission; these missions had to be reminded to desist from such deceptions several times between 1375 and 1379 before the practice was stopped. Clearly, the emperor was aware that trade was the primary purpose behind dispatching tribute missions to China, but he wanted foreign rulers to be circumspect about it. Finally, the specific reference to “overseas” countries and the mention of “the various small countries of the southern *man*” was omitted. In listing by name the fifteen countries not to be invaded, this final version was more precise than the earlier version, although not necessarily more accurate.

12 Ming T'ai-tsu, *Huang Ming tsu hsün lu* (1373), rpt. in *Ming ch'ao k'ai'ai kuo wen hsien*, (Taipei, 1966), 3, pp. 1686–87. Cf. the final revised version of 1395, *Tsu-hsün*, 3, pp. 1588–91. This explicit policy about “the various small countries of the *man* and *i* overseas separated from us by mountains and seas and far away in a corner” was first enunciated on 30 October (*hsin-wei* in the 9th month), 1371; see *T'ai-tsu pao-hsün* (preface dated about 1418), collected in “Yu I Ti,” ch. 6 of Lü Pen, et al., *Huang Ming pao-hsün* (1602 ed.).

13 Cf. Langlois, “The Hung-wu reign,” p. 168.

Whether the omission of “overseas” was deliberate is less certain; the omission did allow Korea and Vietnam to be included in the list, and the emperor was certainly aware that both countries could be invaded by land routes.

The Ming court also established diplomatic relations with countries to the south that could be reached by land routes. The first Ming emperor had known of foreign countries beyond Yunnan from the records of the Yüan court. In 1371, when he was sending missions in every direction, he probably sent a mission to travel to Burma via Vietnam. This mission was obstructed by a Cham invasion of Vietnam and failed to reach Burma after spending more than two years in Vietnam. During this time, three of the four envoys died. In 1373, the sole survivor returned.¹⁴ As a result, no other effort was made to contact Burma, although the emperor thought that Burma was the most powerful state beyond Vietnam and probably wanted it to ally with him against the Mongolian administration still in control of Yunnan. Whether the first Ming emperor would have incorporated Yunnan into the empire if it had not been under the control of a defiant Mongolian prince is difficult to know. Certainly the fact that Yunnan was still under Mongolian control made it imperative for the emperor to attack it sooner or later. After the successful invasion in 1382, the Yüan policy of appointing central officials to rule over the various ethnic groups in the region was modified; the system of aboriginal offices (*t'u-ssu*) was extended beyond the empire's borders, and local rulers or chiefs were confirmed as imperial commissioners of various grades to rule, at least nominally, on the emperor's behalf. In this way, a system of appointments was instituted which blurred the distinction between foreign vassals and autonomous territories which were beyond direct imperial control. Thus, the creation of a number of territories occupied by related tribes variously known as Shan (in Burma), Lao (in Laos), and Tai (in Yunnan) led to the curious situation of having the rulers of Hsien-lo (Siam), also members of these related tribes, recognized as kings (*kuo wang*), but not any of the other rulers. Nor were the rulers among the Burmans and the Mon ever given titles as kings. The latter were merely given the military title of pacification commissioner and were regarded as being more directly subordinate to Ming rule.¹⁵

The most significant change in foreign policy during this period was the Ming court's decision not to recognize Burma as a kingdom (*kuo*). This deci-

14 *MSL*, *T'ai-tsu shih-lu*, p. 86; Chiu Ling-yeong, et al., *Ming shih-lu chung chih Tung-nan-ya shih-liao*, vol. 1, p. 18.

15 *MS*, 313–15, chapters on the *t'u-ssu* of Yunnan. Although the ruler at Ava became “Mien-tien pacification commissioner” in 1394, Ming T'ai-tsu, *T'ai-tsu shih-lu*, 242 and 244, still speaks of Mien kuo wang, “the King of Mien” for years 1395 and 1396. In all the later *shih-lu*, Burma is called “Mien-tien,” and never a kingdom.

sion resulted from the Ming policy of encouraging indirect rule, while simultaneously diminishing the status of local rulers in southwest China. After the conquest of Yunnan, this policy was also confirmed for territories farther south. In 1393, after contact had finally been re-established through the Tai principality of Chiengmai (nominally a Ming pacification commission), Burma sent an envoy to China. In 1394, the ruler at Ava was appointed pacification commissioner for his territory. There was no discussion of restoring Burma to the status of a kingdom. The Ming court realized that since the Mongolian destruction of the Burmese kingdom at Pagan, various Shan states had been formed (even the Ava kingdom was ruled by a branch of the Shan royal house) and the once great Burmese kingdom had become fragmented.

The Ming court continued the policy of keeping these states divided and weak. As the Ming emperor saw it, the Maw Shan state of Lu-ch'uan was the most powerful and threatening of these principalities.¹⁶ It was within striking distance of Ta-li and controlled large tracts of territory beyond the Salween River. It was also trying to destroy Ava and to unify the other Shan states under its leadership. Consequently, a few years after the conquest of Yunnan, the emperor acted to contain this state and to break its power. The Ming court had already established three Shan-Tai pacification commissioners, the other two being Ch'e-li (Sipsong Banna and areas in Yunnan, Burma, and Laos around it) and Chiengmai (Pa-pai). Chiengmai had provided the first diplomatic link with the Burmese court at Ava; the conferral of titles on Ava's Shan ruler was another step in the policy to contain the Maw Shan state. After 1402, it was left to the first emperor's son, the Yung-lo emperor, to complete the fragmentation of the old Burmese kingdom by raising two more Shan states bordering on Lu-ch'uan to the status of pacification commissions. The Yung-lo emperor, however, was the architect of a more aggressive policy, one that his father would not have approved.

The founder of the dynasty had laid down a framework for his successors' foreign policies, and had specified in such detail what they had to do, that foreign relations thereafter might have been expected to have adhered closely to his instructions, but this did not happen. The first emperor's successor, the Chien-wen emperor, was his grandson, but the Chien-wen emperor's uncle, one of the first emperor's sons, overthrew him in 1402. The usurper, the Yung-lo emperor, felt the need to legitimize his accession as thoroughly as his father, the first emperor, had, and that included implementing an aggressive foreign policy on all fronts. His most radical policies concerned relations with Southeast Asia and the countries bordering on the Indian

16 See Ch'ien Ku-hsun, *Pai I Chuan*, annotated by Chiang Ying-liang (Kunming, 1980) provides the fullest account of the Maw Shan state. A briefer version is in *MS*, 314, pp. 8111–14.

Ocean. His most renowned action in foreign policy was the dispatch of immense naval expeditions under the eunuch admiral Cheng Ho. During the Yung-lo reign, tense relations between Vietnam and Champa were overshadowed by the growing tensions between Vietnam and China. Even relations with the Shan and Tai states to the south of Yunnan were affected by the aggressive imperial policy to dominate Vietnam, while all other overseas relations were eclipsed by the grand voyages to the Western Oceans. The developments that occurred during the Yung-lo reign may be understood best by first considering the invasion of Vietnam and then Cheng Ho's naval expeditions, and examining the far-reaching ramifications of each.

On the surface, the Yung-lo emperor simply reaffirmed his father's policies: no private contact with foreigners; no private foreign trade; and no trading or other relations outside a carefully regulated tributary system. In practice, he was more demanding, more aggressive, and more willing than his father had been to intervene and to threaten when people (either Chinese adventurers or foreign rulers) did not do what he expected them to do. This belligerence might have resulted from his insecurity with respect to his imperial relatives, for whom his usurpation remained a stigma. It might also have come about owing to his attitude towards the use of force. He was a great soldier and believed that many problems could be solved by military means. His relations with Vietnam illustrate this position particularly well. When the new ruler of Vietnam, who had failed to gain recognition from the Yung-lo emperor's nephew in 1400, again asked to be recognized as the legitimate successor of the defunct Trần dynastic house, the emperor responded with caution. His father had been unhappy about a series of usurpations that had taken place since 1370; none of the rulers after that time had satisfied Ming officials' inquiries about their legitimacy.

The Yung-lo emperor followed his father's policy in seeking to confirm the legitimacy of the Vietnamese king. When his officials assured him that the ruler was a relative of the Trần house who had been chosen as the new ruler, he was content to confirm him "king" of An-nan (Annam). Then, to his great annoyance, a few months later he discovered that the man was a usurper and a regicide. The same thing had happened thirty years earlier, when his father had been deceived and manipulated in the interest of Vietnamese court politics. As had his father, the Yung-lo emperor had insisted on verifying the new Vietnamese king's claim and had, in like manner, been deceived. The sole remaining descendant of the Trần line was then found and returned to Vietnam to be king, but was murdered on his arrival. The Yung-lo emperor, who had pledged his support to the now defunct Trần house, was outraged at the Vietnamese usurper's treachery. His anger was so great that he immediately ordered a full-scale invasion of Vietnam. He was perfectly

aware that Vietnam was on his father's list of countries "never to be invaded," but he believed that there was sufficient provocation in this instance to override the *Ancestral injunctions*. The Vietnamese usurper simply could not be allowed to go unpunished. The Yung-lo emperor was no doubt aware of the questions surrounding his own legitimacy. He certainly could not permit it to be said that he was not a strong supporter of a legitimate ruling house.

A large expeditionary army consisting of units from more than ten provinces was dispatched to Vietnam. This expedition may be compared with the expedition of the armies sent by the Yung-lo emperor's father into Yunnan twenty-five years earlier which had been an immediate and total success. The main armies in the later campaign passed through Kwangsi; one army came down the Red River from Yunnan itself; and other units were sent by sea routes. The initial successes of the campaign, including the overthrow of the usurper, came swiftly, but were followed by years of frustration and eventually by admission that the whole campaign had been a mistake and a failure. The main difference between the conquest of Yunnan and this campaign was that the Vietnamese had, by this time, become a fairly homogeneous state with a sophisticated administrative system based on the Chinese model. Vietnam had a distinct cultural identity and the resources to resist becoming incorporated into a Chinese empire.¹⁷

The superficial similarities between Vietnam and China, which included the use of the same written Chinese language, and the use of similar Confucian rhetoric and state institutions, led the emperor to an unfortunate decision. Not content with ousting the usurper of the legitimate Trần dynasty, he decided that Vietnam was sufficiently like China for it to be reorganized as a Chinese province. The Trần dynastic house had no legitimate claimants to the throne at this point and the Chinese emperor thought he could establish historic territorial rights on the basis of boundaries established under the Han dynasty almost 1,500 years earlier. Thus the fateful decision to destroy the kingdom and to administer Vietnam centrally from Nanking came about.

Another reason for this decision was the Vietnamese claim that theirs was an empire equal to Ming China. When its capital was taken and "imperial" Vietnamese records and documents were found, these were considered further evidence of the Vietnamese court's presumption and duplicity. While the Yung-lo emperor was justified in believing that the Vietnamese

17 Wang Gungwu, "China and Southeast Asia, 1402–1424." In *Studies in the Social History of China and Southeast Asia: essays in memory of Victor Purcell*, eds. Jerome Ch'en and Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 381–3; Wang Gungwu, "Chang Fu" and "Huang Fu," in *DMB*, pp. 64–7, 653–6. See also C. P. FitzGerald, *The southern expansion of the Chinese people* (New York, 1972), for an extended discussion about Vietnamese national identity in contrast to the peoples of Nan Chao and Ta-li in Yunnan.

were accustomed to being ruled in a Chinese imperial style, he failed to see that his cultural assumptions were opposed by something akin to cultural nationalism. The fact that this proto-nationalism had been expressed in Chinese cultural terms was particularly misleading.

The war in Vietnam, the failure to hold it after twenty years of fighting and occupation, and the amazing success of Vietnamese guerrilla war tactics belong properly to the history of China and of Vietnam, and the details need not concern us here.¹⁸ The Vietnamese usurper, Lê Loi (ca. 1385–1433), also known as the founder of the Later Lê dynasty, was recognized by the Chinese only after they withdrew from Vietnam in 1427. The “Later Lê” dynasty existed somewhat uncertainly until the early sixteenth century, when the Mac family gained control in the North, and the subsequent political division of North and South Vietnam was initiated.¹⁹ What is relevant is what China’s failure in Vietnam meant for its relations with other countries in Southeast Asia. Vietnam’s two neighbors were drawn into the conflict. Champa, Vietnam’s perennial enemy and a loyal vassal of China which depended on China to hold the Vietnamese back, found that having Ming China as a neighbor was even more uncomfortable than having the smaller Vietnamese kingdom as a neighbor. The Cham rulers were forced to send troops and supplies to support the Ming occupation, but they soon found that Ming officials insisted on the same claims the Vietnamese had made on lands which the Chams had also claimed. When the Ming took these territories, Champa had nowhere to turn.

Even more significant was the final outcome of the war. Before the Yunglo emperor ordered the invasion of Vietnam, China’s authority was backed by its enormous military potential which the Vietnamese had no wish to test. An admonition from the Ming emperor was a useful deterrent. But when the war went badly after the initial victories and when the Ming armies failed again and again to crush the Vietnamese “rebels,” that authority lost its deterrent force. Champa was, in the end, confounded by three developments: its own anger at the cupidity of Chinese soldiers and officials; its growing respect for Vietnamese resistance to China under Lê Loi and his successors; and, finally, its alarm at China’s defeat and the emergence of a much more powerful and united Vietnamese nation. The end result, the weakening of Ming authority over Vietnam for the remainder of the dynasty, sealed the fate of Champa. Champa’s attempts to restore the status quo ante, when

18 See John Whitmore, *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly and the Ming (1371–1421)* (New Haven, 1985); and *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, pp. 229–31, 289–91.

19 See Nicholas Tarling, ed., *From early times to c. 1800*, Vol. 1, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 150–53 and 415–418.

it was a power equal to Vietnam, were disastrous, and Ming exhortations no longer carried authority sufficient to restrain the Vietnamese when the opportunity came for them to destroy Champa a few decades later.²⁰

The invasion of Vietnam had repercussions among other peoples in mainland Southeast Asia as well. The Chams, emboldened by China's invasion and occupation of their ancient enemy, Vietnam, attacked Cambodia. For a while, Cambodia was threatened from two sides, for Ayutthaya (Siam), to the west, also continued to expand at its expense. Then, for the only time during the Ming dynasty, Cambodia successfully sought Chinese help to restrain the Chams. After the Chinese retreat from Vietnam, however, it was Vietnam, and not China, that restrained and finally destroyed the Chams.

The role of Laos during the Ming occupation of Vietnam was more interesting. It was one of several similar principalities south of Yunnan, and its ruler was a loyal pacification commissioner who had been confirmed in his position by the Yung-lo emperor. Laos had emerged as a result of Khmer efforts to keep the various Tai chieftains divided in order to stop the expansion of Ayutthaya. Ming policy, for different reasons, supported fragmentation along the empire's southwestern borders; and the Ming court recognized Laos as a *t'u-ssu*, or aboriginal office, with the rulers given titles as pacification commissioners, in the same way that it had acknowledged Ch'e-li (Sipsong Banna), Pa-pai (Chiengmai), Lu-ch'uan (the Maw Shans) and several other principalities.

Laos was content to survive by means of diplomacy, dealing with Cambodia to its south, Vietnam to its west and distant China beyond the minor tribal confederacies to its north. But, when Vietnam came under Chinese rule, its position was less secure. Defeated Vietnamese forces, unwilling to escape south to seek help from their traditional enemies in Champa, preferred to take refuge in Laos. The Laotian ruler, however, was not prepared to take sides in the war. He had not wished to have Ming China as a neighbor and probably sympathized with the widespread Vietnamese hostility against Chinese rule. On the other hand, he did not want to anger the Ming court. Thus, when asked not to support the Vietnamese, he discouraged Vietnamese "rebels" from making Laos their base for anti-Ming resistance; but he probably also anticipated that it was the Vietnamese his country would have to live with in the long run, so he took care not to arouse Vietnamese hostility towards Laos.

All the T'ai states bordering the province of Yunnan felt the impact of the invasion of Vietnam. That province provided large armies for the campaign,

²⁰ On the history of Champa, see G. Maspero, *Le royaume de Champa* (Paris, 1928). Also *MS*, 324, pp. 8383–93.

not only for the initial invasion, but also for some of the efforts to crush Vietnamese resistance. By 1428, Vietnamese counterattacks up the Red River to the Yunnan border had made clear the limits of Chinese and Vietnamese power in southeastern Yunnan. The small numbers of minority tribesmen in that area must have been awed by both powers and submitted to whichever was the stronger in their neighborhood; but the two large Tai principalities (Laos and Sipsong Banna) that shared borders with both protagonists weighed their futures between the powers and took great care to maintain their independence. Certainly, as long as the Yung-lo emperor was on the throne and showed a willingness to resort to force, all the states bordering on Yunnan found it wise to keep their peace.

The Yung-lo emperor did not, of course, depend solely on threats and on force in the pursuit of his purposes. He systematically continued his predecessor's policy of fragmenting the potentially powerful Tai states in the southwest and appointed at least five new pacification commissioners, largely to break the power of the Maw Shans of Lu-ch'uan and to check the future growth of Burmese power. He pursued two policies towards Ayutthaya (Siam): on the seas, he restrained southward expansion down the Malay peninsula toward Malacca; on land, however, he did not oppose military activities northward against the Burmese, the Cambodians, and other Tai states. In short, the invasion of Vietnam alerted all the states contiguous with Ming China's southern borders that China was prepared to use force. But, perhaps more important in the long run, it also showed that China had neither the will nor the capacity to conquer and hold territory in the south. Its defeat in Vietnam, and the new Vietnamese Lê dynasty's diplomatic skill in keeping China at bay thereafter, were important lessons for all the other states in mainland Southeast Asia. The case of Vietnam showed that it was possible to satisfy Chinese pride while maintaining political independence.

The Yung-lo emperor's aggressive policy toward Vietnam had a counterpart in Cheng Ho's naval expeditions to the Indian Ocean. First, both policies directly contravened the first emperor's explicit injunction against dissipating military force in the south. Second, both undertakings enhanced the Yung-lo emperor's pride and prestige at great cost and without economic benefits or long-term political advantages. Finally, by the end of the Yung-lo emperor's reign, both undertakings had become increasingly burdensome and were clearly not in the empire's interest. The transfer of the capital to Peking in 1419 and the Yung-lo emperor's final desperate personal campaigns to mitigate the far more serious threat from the Mongols in the north changed the focus of foreign policy. It is not surprising that the campaigns against Vietnam and the naval expeditions were both abandoned when his grandson found the imperial coffers bare and the northern borders threatened.

Why, then, did the Yung-lo emperor launch these naval expeditions to Southeast Asia and India and later extend them farther west to Arabia and East Africa? His action was certainly related to his usurpation and his desire for universal legitimation. His announced intention to find his predecessor and nephew, the Chien-wen emperor, who was rumored to have escaped abroad, might have been no more than a public justification to overcome his father's prohibition against military action overseas; but his need to appear as a great and legitimate emperor before all his half-brothers and nephews, before the generals and officials who knew he was a usurper, and, indeed, before all his subjects, led him to seek endorsements from all the foreign rulers his navies could reach. This display of force was also related to his confidence as a soldier, his military success against the Mongols, and his acquisition of a Mongolian view of power and policy from the northern perspective of his new capital at Peking. Hence, the idea that he should send a naval force to ascertain the strength of Timur at Samarkand, who was mounting a campaign against China at the time of his death early in 1405, was not as bizarre as it might seem, although that too may have been done in order to overcome his father's prohibition against overseas adventures.

Finally, the expeditions, and his efforts to persuade all foreign rulers to send tribute missions to him, were related to the imperial policy on trade that his father had initiated. The Yung-lo emperor knew that most tribute missions would not come to China if there were no profits to be made, so he had to make these missions worthwhile. Precisely how worthwhile, and to what extent Ming China's maritime trade benefited from Cheng Ho's expeditions, are questions that cannot be fully answered at this time. Here, attention will focus on the political and international aspects of this spectacular show of force.

Altogether, seven expeditions were sent: in 1405, 1407, 1409, 1413, 1417, 1421, and 1431. The largest consisted of over 300 ships of various sizes (including sixty-two large treasure ships) and over 27,000 men; even the smallest expedition had a fleet of between forty and fifty ships. The first three expeditions went as far as the west coast of India; the fourth went farther, crossing to the Persian Gulf; the fifth and the seventh expeditions visited the east coast of Africa. They were very successful voyages from the point of view of the Yung-lo emperor and his admirals: at least two kingdoms, Melaka, and Samudra-Pasai (North Sumatra), were strengthened by the emperor's formal recognition following this display of naval power.

The expeditions were discontinued after 1433 and the spectacular performance was never repeated. In the end, they left no permanent mark on the thirty or so "countries" visited. As J. V. G. Mills rightly says, "the great

expeditions . . . remained isolated *tours de force*, mere exploits."²¹ There were, of course, other lesser missions preceding, and contemporary with, Cheng Ho's expeditions. Each would normally have been worth noting, especially the side trips Cheng Ho's entourage made to Bengal, Siam, and East Java, and the special missions to Brunei, Sulu, and other islands in the Philippines. Taken together with the whole range of Chinese activity in Southeast Asia, the great expeditions were significant. They certainly impressed the maritime states of Southeast Asia with China's wealth and power, and the increase in trade between these states and the China coast continued thereafter.

Insofar as the Yung-lo emperor tried to create a new framework for overseas foreign relations, one that was based on a regular and overwhelming naval presence and predicated on new attitudes about active intervention, three points became clear. First, this policy was too expensive: it had led to two decades of war in Vietnam and innumerable missions to and from the region, followed by generous, if patronizing, hospitality and gifts. If the policy had been supported by expanded private enterprise in an open economic system, all kinds of benefits might have flowed on to the peoples who lived along the major transportation routes. The cumulative benefits to the economy as a whole might have created sufficient wealth to pay the costs of the missions. But, given the conservative Confucian opinion that the ideal state and society should operate on a limited rural base and that this policy had just been fully and faithfully implemented only a generation earlier, the Ming treasury could not afford such new expenses for long.

Second, the new commitments in the south endangered the northern defenses. The peace that the Yung-lo emperor had achieved in northern and Central Asia after the death of Timur in February, 1405, did not last long. He soon went back to Peking, his old military base, and was off again on campaigns beyond the Great Wall line. The decision to move the capital to Peking, itself an enormously expensive proposition, was only the beginning of a new awareness that displays of power in the north were essential, while such displays in the south were not. The truth behind this became manifest to Yung-lo's immediate successors who realized the inherent contradiction in Yung-lo's last decision to send Cheng Ho to Southeast Asia in 1421, while preparing, at the age of sixty-four, to go on yet another personal campaign against the Mongols, a cause to which, by late in his reign, he had become far more directly committed than he was to the continuing maritime expeditions.

21 J. V. G. Mills, tr. and ed., *Ma Huan, Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, "The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores" [1433] (Cambridge, 1970), p. 34.

Finally, the traditional tribute system was never meant to support active international politics. It had been evolved over centuries to encourage regular but minimal foreign relations, to provide an instrument for imperial defense policy, and to satisfy some of the trading requirements of foreign rulers and Chinese merchants. In sum, the Yung-lo emperor's new activism was actually built on his father's reorganized foreign policy system, which had been carefully restructured to limit further foreign contacts. The use of that same system to pursue interventionist goals suggests that the Yung-lo emperor's ambition ran far ahead of his understanding of the nature of traditional foreign relations with China's Southeast Asian neighbors. For him to think of sending a fleet against Burma in order to help the Shan chiefs of Mu-pang (south of the Maw Shan chieftainship of Luch'uan), or to encourage Brunei and Sulu to throw off their allegiance to Java are some of the most blatant examples of this lack of understanding. He clearly wanted to elicit signs of respect from the smaller and weaker states in the south; but he could not, nor was he willing to, change the basis of China's foreign relations in a creative way. More money, power, and ceremony applied in the same old way was simply bound to fail. It is not surprising, then, that his more conventional grandson, backed by civil officials loyal to Confucian principles as well as to the first emperor's specific injunctions, decided to reverse the Yung-lo emperor's policies within a few years of his death. His grandson decided to end the war in Vietnam and concluded that the great naval expedition of 1431–33 would have to be the last.

During the next two centuries, there were no further Chinese adventures in Southeast Asia. It may be said that there was a return to the first emperor's policy of nonintervention; but it is probably more accurate to say, especially after 1449, when the Mongols captured the Ming emperor and might have taken Peking, that the Ming state was never again confident about the security of its northern frontiers and was thereafter too weak to embark on expeditions beyond its southern borders. Apart from some border troubles with the Maw Shan tribes and Vietnam, and later with Burma and other Shan states, no military forces were sent anywhere near Southeast Asia again. Regular foreign relations continued with a limited number of southern kingdoms, notably Champa until it was destroyed by the Vietnamese, various rulers of Java to the end of the fifteenth century, and Melaka until it fell to the Portuguese in 1511. Only the mainland kingdoms of Vietnam, Ayutthaya (Siam), Laos, Burma, and various Shan and T'ai states had continuous, although not always harmonious, relations with the Ming court to the end.

From the point of view of Ming China's overseas trade, a major turning point came soon after 1500, with the arrival of the Portuguese at Melaka, in the Moluccas, and finally off the coast of China.²² This was the beginning of the period when Western traders, armed and aggressive, undermined Muslim trading power, whether Arab, Persian, or Indian, and indirectly encouraged the development of Chinese and Japanese private trade in Southeast Asia. Thus, the history of Ming overseas trade can be divided fairly equally between the first half of the dynasty, when it was largely dominated by tributary trading, and the second half, when local and Japanese competition and cooperation with Western armed traders off the China coasts became the norm. There are, however, some problems of interpretation which affect the way changes during the Ming have been presented. Lo Hsiang-lin offered the following periodization of history of Ming overseas trade and foreign relations: 1368–1404; 1405–33; 1434–1510; 1511–1618; 1619–61.²³ This division takes developments both in foreign relations and in trade into account; but, if Ming foreign relations are examined more closely, there is no need for such fine divisions. Aside from a short period of aberration in 1402–35, the first Ming emperor's policies remained in effect for the rest of the dynasty. There were, however, important differences between the period preceding the reign of the Cheng-te emperor (1505–21) and the period which followed it.

First, once the dynasty saw that the regimes providing the most imminent dangers to its survival were located in the north, northwest and northeast, relations with southern kingdoms became increasingly ritualistic and peripheral. The Ming dynasty might not have been strong enough to assert its authority in the south – as was clearly seen in its unwillingness to save Champa from Vietnam and to help Melaka against the Portuguese – but it was stable and confident enough not to need legitimization of any kind. Tributary missions no longer had the aura they had had under the Hung-wu and Yung-lo emperors. The means used to maintain diplomatic relations with countries to the south had become expensive and dreary rituals and these relations held no real benefits to the dynasty. As a consequence, tribute missions from overseas virtually ceased by about 1500. Of the few that still came, several were dealt with at the southern ports and were not encouraged to travel north to present tribute to the emperor.

The second difference follows from the first. With the growing meaninglessness of the tribute missions, Ming officials turned a blind eye to the com-

22 See Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi Lii-sung Ho-lan I-ta-li-ya ssu chuan chu-shih* (Beijing, 1934); Chang T'ien-tse, *Sino-Portuguese Trade from 1514 to 1644* (Leiden, 1934; rpt. New York, 1973). A recent annotated edition by Tai I-hsuan, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi chuan chien-cheng* (Beijing, 1984) contains some new materials.

23 Preface by Lo Hsiang-lin to Chiu Ling-yeong, et al., *Ming-shih-lu chung-chih Tung-nan-ya shih-liao* (Hong Kong, 1968), Vol. 1, pp. 2–26.

ing of the Portuguese. Despite the awareness that Portugal was a considerable naval power that had vanquished Melaka, a nominal vassal of the Ming court, there was no serious attempt to use the tributary system for one of the key functions it had been devised to serve. Tributary ceremonies, together with profitable trading opportunities, had helped the Ming court control its neighbors and safeguard its borders. By the time of the Cheng-te reign, the court had lost interest in tributary missions as instrument of control and had come to treat the missions as commercial visits with no political significance.²⁴ Hence, the Ming court failed to notice how rapidly the region had begun to change after the arrival of the Europeans, especially after the Spanish, the Dutch, and the English joined the Portuguese to reshape the map of South and Southeast Asia.

A third development was even more important: the increasing importance of trade to the Ming economy as a whole. The trade in luxury goods alone was stimulated by the activities of the court itself through its thousands of eunuch procurers and the extensive requirements of members of the imperial family throughout China. Although private trade was never officially encouraged, its growth was tolerated, and the need to import certain foreign goods was acknowledged. However, the retention of early Ming policies towards overseas trade and the lack of new institutions to deal with later developments led to severe disruptions along the China coast. The more the Ming officials tried to restrict foreign contacts to one or two ports, the greater the strain placed on local and foreign entrepreneurs who sought each other out. Thus, for long periods after the Cheng-te reign, serious trade and foreign policy issues which could have been resolved by paying closer attention to the details of foreign relations and to the variety of existing trading networks were reduced to questions about how to improve coastal defense and how to repulse widespread and large-scale attacks by pirates.

These pirates comprised an altogether new breed. In contrast to the relatively peaceful groups of Arab, Persian, Hindu, and Moslem traders of South and Southeast Asia, the Portuguese and Japanese freebooters who joined forces with the burgeoning class of Chinese dependent on overseas and coastal trade created a violent and explosive mixture.²⁵ It is a measure of

24 It is interesting to note the sharp contrast between the amount of *shih-lu* material on Southeast Asia before and after 1487 in Chiu Ling-yeong, et al., *Ming shih-lu chung chih Tung-nan-ya shih-liao*: 444 pages from the 120 years between 1368 and 1487, and only 100 pages for the 136 years between 1487 and 1623.

25 Two recent studies have highlighted the importance of trade in the 16th century: Lin Jen-ch'uan, *Ming mo Ch'ing ch'ü ssu-jen hai-shang mao-i* (Shanghai, 1987) and Chang Tseng-hsin, *Ming chi tung-nan Chung-kuo ti hai-shang hua-tung* (Taipei, 1988), Vol. 1. The most accessible Western-language work is So Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century* (East Lansing, 1965).

Ming complacency that, for over 150 years, no attempt was made to review the system, established in the late fourteenth century, by which China determined with whom to carry on foreign diplomatic relations even though regional and global conditions had changed beyond recognition during the interim. The system had, by then, lost its capacity to monitor the extent of those changes. Thus, in terms of foreign relations overseas, the tributary system of regulated trade became ritualized, then nominal, and finally, ineffective.

However, where Ming China's honor, its security, and its cultural superiority were concerned, the system was more useful. This was particularly true of China's overland relations with Southeast Asia. The most striking examples include the wars and border disputes involving the Shan-Tai states, Vietnam, and Burma. Although these conflicts occurred at different times between the middle of the fifteenth century (1438–99) and the end of the sixteenth century, they reflect the basic stability of the Ming state. Despite the danger to Peking in 1449 and the considerable military pressures on the northeastern borders during the 1590s, the tributary system continued to work adequately for the southern borders, even though the court employed the same rhetoric, institutions, and techniques to control "barbarians" that had been in use since the late fourteenth century.

Although Ming forces suffered a disastrous defeat in Vietnam in the 1420s, followed by the loss of Chinese authority among the Shan and Tai states south of K'un-ming and Ta-li; nonetheless, the dynasty coped with rebellion and border disturbances very well. The first test of power and diplomacy was played out with the Maw Shan chiefs from Yung-ch'ang, west of the Salween River. The first Ming emperor had tamed the most powerful Maw Shan leader in 1387 and then, after 1398, carved up the large state of Lu-ch'uan (P'ing-mien) into eight small territories. His son, the Yung-lo emperor, fragmented the Maw Shan state further by establishing two of the territories as pacification commissions, thereby raising them to the same status as Lu-ch'uan, and openly used these two tribes to check the power of Lu-ch'uan. This policy had the unfortunate consequence of exposing the whole fragmented southwest region to the depredations of the ruler at Ava and prepared the way for future Burmese domination of all the Shan states on the Ming border.

The re-emergence of the Maw Shan chieftains of Lu-ch'uan followed on the withdrawal of Ming armies from Vietnam in 1427. Knowing that the Ming court was in no condition to fight on the Yunnan border, the Maw Shan tribes became increasingly ambitious during the next few years. After 1436, their armies began to invade the border counties of central Yunnan, reaching as far as the Yung-ch'ang and Ching-tung. Throughout this period

neither tributary diplomacy nor the administrative mechanisms of the aboriginal offices system could prevent war. When the imperial forces won some victories along the northwestern frontiers, strong voices were raised in favor of sending a full-scale expeditionary army to Lu-ch'uan in 1440. However, a measure of the futility of war in this remote southwestern corner of the empire is revealed in the fact that the campaigns dragged on for nearly a decade without a decisive victory. The Ming court had to call in support from all southern and western provinces and to seek help from Burma and other Shan rivals of Lu-ch'uan before the rebellion was finally crushed. It even promised the land of Lu-ch'uan to any tribal leader who could deliver the heads of the Maw Shan leaders. However, when the Burmese succeeded in doing so, the Ming court withdrew its offer.²⁶

On all counts, the war had disastrous consequences for the Ming state, it disrupted the economies of all the southwestern provinces involved in sending men and supplies to fight a war of attrition against a small tribal state and it cost the Ming court the respect of its tribal allies on the border, who saw how inept and wasteful Ming armies were. Moreover, the war drew commanders, officers, men and other resources from the north which might have been vital to the defence of the northern borders. It is significant that the end of the Lu-ch'uan campaigns early in 1449 was followed immediately by extensive tribal uprisings and other revolts in five provinces south of the Yangtze River, and, on the northern frontiers, by the spectacular defeats later in the year which virtually destroyed the imperial armies in the north and led to the capture of the emperor himself by the Mongols.

The year 1449 was a turning point in the history of the dynasty. The Ming court had barely recovered from the disasters in Vietnam when it became involved in the costly and unnecessary wars on the Shan-Burma border. Thereafter, Ming China never again sent large armies to fight beyond its southern borders. The dynasty was fortunate to have survived these campaigns. There was subsequently no doubt that the gravest threat to dynastic security came from the Mongols just north of Peking. The south had to be better managed through tributary rhetoric and diplomatic maneuvers: war could not be counted on even as a last resort. Thus, Ming relations with Vietnam and Burma for the next two centuries were dominated by high-flown and reassuring rhetoric mixed with a few feeble threats. From time to time, military expeditions were mounted to deal with disputes involving various

²⁶ *MS*, 314, pp. 8111–23; 315, pp. 8129–55. A slightly fuller account may be found in Yen Ts'ung-chien, *Szu-yü chou-tzu lu* (Ku-kong po-wu yuan edn., Beijing, 1930) 9, pp. 12a–31b. See also G. E. Harvey, *A History of Burma from the earliest times to 1824* (London, 1925) and Wang P'o-leng, *Chung Mien kuan-hsi shih* (Ch'angsha, 1941).

tribes on the borders, notably those between Yunnan and Burma and between Kwangsi and Vietnam, but the scale of fighting was kept down to the levels appropriate to these two relatively minor powers, both of which were clever enough never to challenge the Ming empire's power directly.

Relations with Vietnam provide a useful illustration of how important the tributary framework was in insuring peace in the south. Two examples will suffice: one concerns the reign of the Lê ruler Le Thanh Ton (1460–1497),²⁷ and the other concerns the beginning and end of the Mac regime in northern Vietnam (1537–97). Under Thanh Ton, two related events put the Ming tributary system to the test.²⁸ The first was the final destruction of the Cham kingdom in 1471, and the other, the invasion of Laos between 1479 and 1481. The demise of Champa forty-five years after China's defeat in Vietnam was certainly related to the Ming occupation of Vietnam. Before the Ming invasion in 1406, the two states of Champa and Vietnam had been evenly matched for more than a millennium. Even the Mongolian invasion of both countries at the end of the thirteenth century had not upset that balance. An invasion of Champa by Vietnam was invariably followed by a counter-invasion of Vietnam by Champa. This happened over and again, and China's role as moderator was relatively easy. Admonition of the invader and exhortation against retaliation was sufficient to quell hostilities as long as each attack was indecisive and expensive in men and goods. China's successful invasion in 1406, however, resulted in a tighter administration of Vietnam which the Lê dynasty inherited and expanded. It also led to a unified resistance movement that strengthened the Vietnamese armies and gave them a new confidence. Most important, China's defeat in 1426–27 destroyed China's credibility as a chastiser of the defiant and the rebellious.

The Vietnamese were now certain that Ming China would not invade again if tributary procedures were followed and the Chinese court did not lose face. Moreover, the re-affirmation of Confucianism as a state ideology led to the restoration of Vietnam's own tributary system. Tai and other tribal minorities to the west had already been designated by Vietnam as pacification commission territories on the Chinese aboriginal offices model. Vietnam had become so adept at managing its tributary relations with China that it also became very skilled at dealing with its neighbors as its own tributary states.

The crucial test of Vietnamese power came first against Champa and then against the Tai states in the interior (Laos, Chiangmai and Sipsong Banna). After destroying Champa in 1471, Vietnam informed the Ming court that

27 Identified in the Ming dynasty records as Le Hao; cf. *DMB*, p. 1030, and *MSL*, *passim*.

28 *MS*, 321, pp. 8327–37. The *shih-lu* material is collected in Chiu Ling-yeong, et al., *Ming shih-lu chung chib Tung-nan-ya shih-liao* (Hong Kong, 1976), vol. 2, pp. 639–710.

the fall of Champa's ruling house had come about as a result of civil war. A new Cham court was created in the southern corner of what was left of Champa; its puppet king paid tribute to Vietnam, while another candidate to the Cham throne sought the Ming court's intervention. During the next four decades, the exchanges between this Cham claimant and the Chinese court, and between China and Vietnam taxed the tributary system to its limit.

These exchanges illustrate that when China was weak and did not want to resort to the use of force, the language and institutions of the tributary system provided an elaborate way for the court to maintain its myth of superiority and its image as protector of the weak against the strong. The evasions, rationalizations, and specious arguments of officials reluctant to support a loser fill the records. The result was never in doubt, and both the Vietnamese and Chinese courts probably realized this throughout the four decades of discussions. Champa was finished as a power; its lands had been absorbed, and China and Vietnam could go on indefinitely exchanging Confucian niceties over the question of responsibility. Meanwhile, Vietnam sent missions to China which the court considered tribute missions; the Ming court enfeoffed the Vietnamese ruler as the "king" of An-nan, while the Vietnamese used a rhetoric which placed their court on equal footing with the Ming empire. The Cham pretender paid tribute both to Vietnam and to China. A great deal of tension and resentment was diverted into rituals, proclamations, and commentaries. Everything was arranged so that the Chinese tributary system appeared to be what was restraining the Vietnamese and pacifying the Chams; this satisfied the Ming court's sense of moral superiority and thus kept the peace for over four decades.

Thanh Ton's other expansionist effort was less successful, but it throws light on the diplomatic aspects of the Chinese aboriginal offices system. Thanh Ton invaded Laos and other Tai tribal territories in 1479. The Vietnamese had noted during the Ming occupation of Vietnam that the ruler of Laos held Chinese titles and supported Chinese efforts to suppress Vietnamese resistance. Thanh Ton's grandfather, Lê Loi, had been unable to find secure refuge in Laos during his efforts to free Vietnam from Ming occupation forces. Later, the Lê court also realized that Laos was expanding its authority over Tai peoples who had previously acknowledged Vietnam's suzerainty and had regularly paid tribute to Vietnam. Thus, the campaigns to reassert Vietnam's authority over the Tai tribes led to the invasion of Laos. Luang Prabang was captured and its ruler killed. When one of the ruler's sons escaped to Chiangmai (nominally a Ming tributary state), Vietnam tried to enlist Sipsong Banna, a Chinese pacification commission, to help invade Chiangmai. In turn, Ming border officials warned Sipsong Banna not to become involved in this struggle. Chiangmai, on the other hand, sided with

Laos to drive off the Vietnamese army, and the Ming court rewarded Chiengmai for its loyalty. The Vietnamese denied that Laos had been attacked; they insisted that they did not even know where Chiengmai was and suggested that Chinese officials had been misinformed. Ming officials, however, thought they saw a pattern in Thanh Ton's aggressive behavior: excuses made when raiding across the border into Kwangsi and Yunnan were compared with those made to attack and kill in Laos, and a prince of Laos was hurriedly confirmed as the country's new ruler.

Thanh Ton's armies did not return to the Mekong delta. He had regained control over his immediate tribal neighbors and had secured Vietnam's western borders. Laos, Chiengmai and Sipsong Banna did not pursue the matter any further, and the Ming emperor was content to send Thanh Ton an admonitory letter reminding him, as the king of a cultured nation, of his Confucian obligations to remain loyal, to act righteously, to maintain harmonious relations with sister states who acknowledged the emperor as Son of Heaven, and to care for the lives of the people under his rule.²⁹

There are several remarkable features to this affair. First, Ming China was aware that Vietnam had established its own aboriginal offices system along its northern and western borders and did not object to that arrangement. In this way, the Ming court conceded a higher status to monarchical states like Vietnam and Champa than to the ten southern pacification commissions, including Laos and Burma. Yet, China also knew that such a monarchy might be nominal. Only China's formal recognition of the "king" of Champa after 1471 prevented Champa from being seen as what it was, a vassal state of Vietnam, weaker by far than Laos, Chiengmai, and Sipsong Banna, which had the relatively low status of pacification commissions. The latter three did not, in fact, depend on China, and certainly never in the way that Champa continued to rely on Chinese assistance. Finally, and most remarkably, was the fact that there were no references in Ming official documents to the numerous wars which Chiengmai and Laos fought with Ayutthaya (Siam). This was not because the Chinese did not know how aggressive Ayutthaya was. On the contrary, China had to warn Ayutthaya against attacking Melaka, Sumatra, and Champa. But a sharp line seems to have been drawn to separate Ayutthaya, a foreign country (*wai guo*), from the Shan-Tai pacification commissions that functioned as extensions of China's provincial governments.

It is not clear whether the Chinese simply did not know or did not care about Siamese aggression, or whether regular Siamese tributary missions had focused the court's attention so successfully on their activities overseas

²⁹ See the emperor's letter as partially recorded in *Ming Hsien-tsung shih-lu*, ch. 216, day jen-tzu, 6th month of Ch'eng-hua 17 (July 9, 1481).

that the Ming court never looked at Siam as a possible threat to the peace of Ming China's southern borders. In light of the Ming court's concern about Vietnam's invasion of Laos, it is astonishing that the Chinese said nothing about Siamese attacks and so little about the Burmese conquest of Chiengmai (not to mention Ayutthaya) and several invasions of Laos during the sixteenth century. This certainly confirms that, while there was a considerable blurring of the distinctions between aboriginal offices and foreign countries on the Southeast Asian mainland, this was not the case for Vietnam. Vietnam was the closest foreign state to the areas of South China administered by the Ming government. It had defeated the Ming armies, and it had modeled its state system directly on the Chinese administrative system. Vietnam was a special case: the tributary system was not always an appropriate mechanism for the conduct of foreign relations with that country.

During the sixteenth century, Vietnam was weakened once more by internal dissension, and China, invited to intervene, did not hesitate to aggravate the internecine strife. Yet, although all parties subscribed to the same values and were skilled in the use of the same rhetoric and institutions of tribute diplomacy, the outcome was far from simple. As before, China and Vietnam went to the brink of war. This time, however, war was averted when the Mac usurpers submitted themselves to the Ming; Vietnam's status in the tribute system was reduced from that of a monarchy to a superior form of pacification commission (*tu-t'ung shih ssu*).³⁰ Vietnam officially remained in this position until the end of the dynasty, even though the Mac house was overthrown and the Lê house was restored in 1592.

While Vietnam was a much reduced force during the sixteenth century, the Burmese under Tabinshweti and Bayinnang had become the major force in mainland Southeast Asia. The contrast between Burma and Vietnam during this period is interesting. The weaker Vietnam had not been reduced to the status of an aboriginal office, because it was administered not by barbarian chieftains, but by Confucian literati. Yet, powerful Burma was not even treated as a foreign country, as Ayutthaya had always been. Despite the fact that by the second half of the sixteenth century Burma was one of the most powerful countries in mainland Southeast Asia, it was still registered as an aboriginal office under the jurisdiction of the governor of Yunnan. This anomaly became even more clear when, at the height of its power, Burma had subju-

30 Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, 1983), p. 343 suggests the *tu-t'ung* is a military title equivalent to Campaign Commander. This title, however, was not regularly used during the Ming. Where Vietnam's status here was being demoted, I suggest that the context was one comparable to that of the Burmese and Shan-Tai-Lao *bsuan-fu* or *bsuan-wei shih* (pacification commissioner), but higher. Therefore, I think "a superior form of pacification commission" is appropriate.

gated Ayutthaya and almost all the pacification commissions to the south of the Yunnan border.³¹

China's system of foreign relations remained unchanged throughout the Ming, and this obscured the magnitude of the political and economic changes in Southeast Asia over the course of three centuries. The failure to grasp the significance of the arrival of European powers in the South China Sea and along the China coast was matched by the failure to see that the extension of the aboriginal office system beyond Yunnan could not indefinitely prevent the consolidation of powerful states and could not ultimately ensure China's control over them.

The spectacular successes of the Burmese under Tabinshweti and Bayin-nang put an end to Vietnamese expansion. Only the earlier aggression of Ayutthaya was comparable. The fact was, Ming China witnessed the thrust of three major forces – the Thai, the Vietnamese and the Burmese – southward down the valleys and along the coast of mainland Southeast Asia. Did the dynasty's mixed system of tributary states, aboriginal offices, and pacification commissions help it understand what was going on in the region? It is difficult to see how it could have. Vietnam was a former part of China practicing a familiar Confucian style of government and was therefore unique. The kingdom of Ayutthaya seemed to have become removed from its links with the tribal groups closely related through a common language, like the Shan in Yunnan and Burma, the Lao in Laos, and the Tai in Yunnan. Ayutthaya was mainly seen as a maritime power stretching down the Malay peninsula into insular Southeast Asia and one trading even to the east of China with countries like the Ryūkyūs and Japan.³²

Any understanding of the political role of Burma was hampered by describing it as an aboriginal office subject to the jurisdiction of the governor of Yunnan, even after its resurgence in the 1540s. Indeed, surviving Ming records about Burma reveal this all too clearly. Apart from a few hints that it had Mon and Siamese neighbors and was in touch with the Portuguese to its south, Burma appeared to the Ming court as a recalcitrant and surprisingly powerful aboriginal power against which the rest of the aboriginal powers could form defensive alliances of various kinds and varying strengths. It is extraordinary to see the grand reunification of Burma during the sixteenth century depicted in Ming records as a number of troublesome border incidents on particular stretches of the Irrawaddy and the Salween rivers (with occasional alarms along the Mekong River as well). This was the region

31 On Burma's rise to power in this period, see Harvey, *A history of Burma*. Also see D. G. E. Hall, *A history of Southeast Asia*, 4th ed. (London, 1981), pp. 287–95.

32 David K. Wyatt, *Thailand, a short history* (New Haven, 1982, 1984), p. 104.

where Chu Yu-lang, the last claimant to the Ming throne, finally escaped when his armies were defeated in Kwangsi and Kweichow. When he fled from Yunnan, his only hope of survival was to take refuge in Burma. It was, no doubt, an act of desperation. Although this last claimant to the throne had resided for many years in Kwangsi and Hunan, it is doubtful whether he knew what kind of state Burma was. He would have had to depend on the governor of Yunnan for advice. If he thought Burma was just another aboriginal office with doubtful loyalties towards the Ming emperor instead of the powerful foreign state it was, then, clearly, the absolute and unchanging system for controlling China's foreign neighbors was as misleading to Ming contemporaries as it remains today for students of Chinese history.

CHAPTER 7

RELATIONS WITH MARITIME EUROPEANS, 1514–1662

THE TRIBUTE SYSTEM MATRIX

Between 1514 and 1662, the people and government of China were involved in, and affected by, the first stages of the development of a “modern world system.” This involvement was implemented via the sea routes linking all the continents except Antarctica and Australia in exchanges of trade goods, food plants, diseases, people, and ideas. Ming official concepts and formalized institutions of foreign relations offered little guidance to Chinese officials and had little effect on Sino-European relations after the first encounters with the Portuguese, but actual official responses were alert, flexible, and reasonably effective. Chinese merchants, craftsmen, and sailors became extremely vigorous participants in building a new world of trade and settlement around the South China Sea. The rise of Nagasaki and other ports of Kyushu, the beginnings of Chinese settlement of Taiwan, the sudden emergence of Haich’eng and then Amoy, the flourishing of Macao, Manila, Banten, Batavia, Ayudhya, Melaka, and many more centers of commercial and economic growth depended very heavily on the activities of these Chinese entrepreneurs. The silk-silver trades with Japan and Manila had substantial effects on the Ming economy. The Roman Catholic missionary presence and Chinese responses to it, while on a small scale, reached all levels of Chinese society. As we seek to understand the vigor of these private involvements, we need to draw on our growing knowledge of late Ming culture and society, and especially of maritime China as a regional variant in society, economy, and polity. The changes in empire-wide politics so well summarized in Volume 7 frequently help us to understand the changes in official approaches to maritime problems.

Certain long-standing characteristics of the Chinese approach to foreign relations were maintained in the Ming tributary system. These were defensiveness, a concentration on the ceremonial supremacy of the emperor, unilateral bureaucratic regulation, and the limitation of foreign contacts. The Ming tribute system brought these characteristics together in a uniquely systematized and bureaucratized form. I have argued elsewhere that it would

help to clarify our thinking if we would reserve the term “tribute system” for this Ming system and not use it loosely to refer to the less systematic and more varied diplomatic practices of other times.¹ Be that as it may, it is clear that a very important determinant of early Ming policies toward maritime foreign relations was the court’s reaction to the menace of the “Japanese pirates,” many of whom were actually Chinese. Private maritime trade by Chinese was entirely prohibited, and foreign trade in Chinese ports was limited to trade in connection with tribute embassies, the size and frequency of which also were regulated. The Cheng Ho voyages are best seen as an anomalous state-directed revival within the framework of the tribute system of Sung-Yüan positive attitudes toward maritime trade; the end of these official expeditions and the prohibition of private Chinese voyages left a sharply reduced Chinese maritime presence in Southeast Asia. In this semi-vacuum, the India-centered Muslim network of maritime trade flourished, and various Southeast Asian states, mostly Muslim, expanded their trade to China in connection with tribute embassies. The Ryukyans also profited from the prohibition of Chinese maritime trade and from the drastic limits on Japanese embassies to China, becoming important intermediaries between China and Japan, and trading as far as Melaka. The Chinese never ceased to trade and settle abroad illegally and sometimes cooperated with Southeast Asian princes, especially the Kings of Siam, in the management of their tribute embassies.²

By 1500, the expansion of Chinese illegal maritime trade had produced a flourishing outlaw entrepôt at Yüeh-kang near Chang-chou in Fukien. In the Cheng-te period, ships from Southeast Asian tributary states were allowed to come as frequently as they wished, without regard for the limitations of time and number specified in the regulations of the tribute system, and their trade was taxed. The Superintendencies of Maritime Shipping (*shih-po-ssu*) were directed by eunuchs, who were especially interested in obtaining rare imports for the Palace. The Kwangtung Superintendency had a tax-collection station at the distant coastal point of Tien-pai in Kao-chou to accommodate this trade,³ and apparently had a station later at T’un-men in the Canton Estuary, the scene of the first encounters with the Portuguese, or at Macao itself.

1 John E. Wills, Jr., “Tribute, defensiveness, and dependency: Uses and limits of some basic ideas about Mid-Ch’ing foreign relations,” *Annals of the Southeast Conference of the Association for Asian Studies*, 8 (1986), pp. 84–90; rpt. in *American Neptune*, 48, No. 4 (Fall, 1988), pp. 225–29. For a sketch of the history of the Ming tribute system see Wills, *Embassies and illusions: Dutch and Portuguese envoys to K’ang-hsi, 1666–1687* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), pp. 14–23.

2 See *MS*, 28, p. 8,400 on one Hsieh Wen-pin, who became a high official in Siam, led a Siamese tribute embassy in 1481, and was caught trading in prohibited goods.

3 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi, Lü-sung, Ho-lan, I-ta-li-ya ssu-chuan chu-shih* (Peiping, 1934), p. 52. All my citations of the four *chüan* of the *Ming-shih* on relations with Europeans will refer to this heavily annotated edition. For relations with the Portuguese see also Chou Ching-lien, *Chung-P’u chiao-t’ung shih* (Shanghai, 1936).

This Southeast Asian trade, officially approved, but in violation of the basic rules of the tribute system, provided the matrix for the flourishing trade between Siam and Melaka and South China, within which matrix the Portuguese began their relations with China.

THE PORTUGUESE ENTRY, 1514–1524

Vasco da Gama's voyage around the Cape of Good Hope, and the arrival of his ships at Calicut on the west coast of India in 1498, opened a new phase in the history of Asia and, in conjunction with the Columbus voyages to the Americas in the same decade, of the world. The effects of the European intrusion into the Indian Ocean were by no means as catastrophic as the effects of the Spanish on the Caribbean, and on Mexico and Peru; until the age of steam Asian maritime traders remained effective competitors of the Europeans on most routes, and in most goods, and European political power was confined to small islands and coastal enclaves until the Dutch advances in Java from the 1670s on, and until the rise of English power in India after 1750. Still, the Portuguese and their successors could be very disruptive. The very prosperous and sophisticated network of Muslim maritime trade linking the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf with India and Southeast Asia was not well adapted, either in ship construction or in organization, to resist or engage in the combination of piracy, superior naval gunnery, and aggressive efforts to monopolize lines of trade which the Portuguese brought with them from the Mediterranean world. The Portuguese seriously disrupted the trade of their Muslim rivals until after 1550, when they became more interested in their own inter-Asian trade and more accommodative toward their Muslim competitors. This pattern was mirrored in their relations with China, where early aggressiveness led to disaster, but where commercial accommodation after 1550 was a brilliant success.

At Calicut, on the southwest coast of India, Vasco da Gama heard stories of pale, bearded men on big ships who had sailed along that coast several generations before; the Portuguese did not realize that these were allusions to the great fleets of Cheng Ho.⁴ If the Ming state had not abandoned its great maritime venture, the Portuguese would have found it much more difficult to get a foothold on the coast of India, and probably could have accomplished nothing in Melaka, Sumatra, and Siam.

⁴ Donald Ferguson, "Letters from Portuguese Captives in Canton, written in 1534 and 1536. With an introduction on Portuguese intercourse with China in the first half of the sixteenth century," *Indian Antiquary*, 30 (1901), pp. 421–51, 467–91, at p. 421.

Melaka became the key to the Portuguese advance toward China. The first Portuguese expedition there was instructed to find out as much as possible about the “Chijns” and their trade. Chinese merchants trading at Melaka, somewhat at odds with the local rulers, befriended the Portuguese in 1509, and, in 1511, when Albuquerque conquered Melaka, the Chinese merchants loaned his invasion force a large junk which he used in a key landing that led directly to the final rout of the Melakan forces.⁵ The Chinese merchants sought to remain on good terms with the new conquerors, transporting a Portuguese ambassador to and from Siam on their junks. We have only shadowy knowledge of the first two visits to China under Portuguese auspices by Jorge Alvares in 1514, and by the Italian, Rafael Perestrello, in 1515–16. Perestrello went on the junk of a Melaka merchant, and it is likely that Alvares also took advantage of Melakan or Chinese shipping. Both traded at T’un-men in the Canton Estuary and brought back highly profitable cargoes.

The scope of the Portuguese effort altered dramatically with the arrival in the Canton Estuary in August 1517 of eight ships under Fernão Peres de Andrade, bearing Tomé Pires as ambassador from the King of Portugal to the Ming Court. Peres de Andrade had been sent from Lisbon in 1515 expressly for this mission, along with the Florentine merchant Giovanni da Empoli, who already had been in India and had written an excellent summary of the potentialities of the China trade. The choice of Pires as ambassador was a brilliant, unconventional one: in a society where noble blood was usually a prerequisite for important office, he was a bourgeois pharmacist, recently charged with investigating and collecting Asian drugs to send home to King Manuel. He was the best European collector of information on Asia in his time; his *Suma Oriental* is the most important single source, in any language, on the trade of maritime Asia at the beginning of the Portuguese intrusion. His progress toward China was delayed in the Straits of Melaka by the loss of a ship and by a discussion of an alternative venture to Bengal, but his progress was then accelerated by the glowing report on the China trade brought by Rafael Perestrello to Melaka in 1516.

Upon his arrival in the Canton Estuary in August 1517, Peres de Andrade, with Empoli serving as factor (commercial agent) and frequent intermediary with the Chinese authorities, made every effort to establish good relations with them. He was reasonably successful, but in the process provided first instances of several sources of trouble which would prove perennial in pre-modern Sino-European relations. European impatience and assumptions of reciprocity in foreign relations encountered Chinese bureaucratic delays and

⁵ Ferguson, “Letters,” p. 422.

the Chinese Government's unilateral approach to the management of foreign relations. The Europeans also evidenced an unfortunate tendency to reject Chinese explanations of their decisions and to interpret these explanations as a result of the corrupt self-interest of the officials.⁶ Dealing at first with the naval commander at Nan-t'ou near the mouth of the Pearl River, Peres de Andrade sought permission for over a month to take his ships up the river to Canton. When he threatened to go without written permission, the naval commander gave way and passed his troublesome guest on to the Canton authorities, giving him pilots to assist him. Arriving before the city without written permission, the Portuguese caused more alarm and indignation by discharging their cannon in a friendly salute. Their explanation that the Chinese merchants did the same thing when they arrived at Melaka, and their declaration that, in taking Melaka, they had avenged the local ruler's tyrannies against the Chinese, could only have added to Ming official concerns, because Chinese overseas trade had been expressly prohibited by the government, and because the deposed King of Melaka had been a loyal Ming tributary. The ships were closely watched, the Portuguese were not allowed ashore, and no one was allowed to approach them. After the high provincial officials arrived at Canton to deal with the strangers, however, the Portuguese were received ashore with considerable pomp, and lodgings were provided for Tomé Pires and the seven Portuguese (and probably some slaves) who were to accompany him on the embassy. Trade goods were brought ashore bit by bit, and the Portuguese were very favorably impressed with the orderly management of trade. One ship was detached to reconnoiter trade prospects on the Fukien coast. Prospects were excellent, but reports to the court of this voyage stirred Chinese fears of spying. Peres de Andrade missed the 1517–18 north monsoon, but left in September 1518 at the very beginning of the next north monsoon, having made a very good impression (a Portuguese chronicler tells us) by posting a notice at T'un-men that anyone who had been injured by a Portuguese or to whom a Portuguese owed money should see him for redress.

In August 1519, Simão de Andrade, brother of Fernão Peres de Andrade, arrived from Melaka with three junks, and soon destroyed the fragile accommodation Fernão had worked so hard to build. At T'un-men, the island center for the trade of all foreigners, he built a small fort, ceremoniously executed a

6 The main Portuguese sources for this account of the Tomé Pires embassy are the passages on it in João de Barros and Diogo de Couto, *Da Ásia* (Lisbon, 1777–78; rpt., Lisbon, 1973–1975), III:I:I; III:II:VI, VII, VIII; III:VI:I,II; III:VIII:V. (The Roman numerals refer to *Decadas*, *Livros*, and *Capítulos*, respectively; individual notes below referring to passages not easily found in this chronological sequence also give page numbers of the above reprint.) On the attributing of all delays to private interests of the officials see III:II:VIII, p. 209.

Portuguese, and barred the other foreigners (presumably Siamese and other Southeast Asians) from trading ahead of him. He and his men knocked the hat off an official who tried to assert Ming authority on the island. They bought Chinese children, some of whom, sons and daughters of good families, were found several years later by the Portuguese authorities at Diu in western India.⁷ The buying and selling of children was scarcely unknown in Ming China, but the large new demand of the Portuguese may have stimulated kidnappings from good families, and also contributed to the stories that soon were circulating of how the Portuguese were buying the children to cook and eat. Simão and his party stayed over the winter and left in September 1520; there is no record of local action to stop or punish their abuses, but reports soon must have been on their way by various channels to Peking, where their impact would combine with other factors to doom the Pires embassy and relegate Portuguese relations with China to an outer margin of illegal private trade for over thirty years.

The embassy party left behind in Canton in 1518 proceeded north only in January 1520. By that time, Portuguese sources tell us, there had been three exchanges of communications about the embassy between Canton and Peking. In contrast to the willingness of Ch'ing rulers and ministers to accept new tributaries and to celebrate them as evidence of the far-reaching charisma of the dynasty, many Ming statesmen seem to have believed that no embassy should be accepted from a ruler who had not been enrolled among the tributary states during the first reigns of the dynasty.⁸ This viewpoint did not immediately prevail during these last years of the Cheng-te Emperor, because of the eunuchs' interest in the exploitation of commerce and the emperor's fascination with all kinds of exotic people. The embassy reached Nanking, where the emperor was residing, in May of 1520, but soon was ordered to go on to Peking and await the emperor's return there. Portuguese sources tell us that, while members of the embassy were waiting in Peking, they had to go on the first and fifteenth of every lunar month to prostrate themselves before a wall of the Forbidden City; I know of no Chinese source on such a ceremony.⁹ They heard of the emperor's arrival at T'ung-chou in January 1521 and the execution there of the captured rebel Prince of Ning. They knew that ambassadors had arrived from the exiled king of Melaka to report on the Portuguese conquest and to ask Chinese assistance in driving out the invaders and restoring the city to its rightful lord. They knew of memorials by two censorial officials, Ch'iu Tao-lung and Ho Ao, condemning the Portu-

7 Barros and Couto, *Da Asia*, III:VI:II, p. 17.

8 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, pp. 9, 32.

9 Ferguson, "Letters", p. 467.

guese conquest of Melaka and urging that the embassy be rejected, and a further memorial from the Canton officials reporting that the Portuguese were troublesome people and were asking to be granted a trading post. They were told that after these negative reports about the Portuguese had been received in the capital, the interpreters were summoned and questioned one by one, and at least one of them confessed that the interpreters had not actually seen the letter from the king of Portugal, since the Portuguese had expected to deliver it sealed into the Emperor's hands, but had made up an appropriate "tribute memorial" text. There is no mention of this in Chinese sources.¹⁰

Although the Portuguese no longer were summoned to the twice-monthly ceremonies outside the Palace, there was no conclusive rejection of the embassy until after the death of the emperor on 19 April, 1521. Mourning for the emperor apparently required the temporary suspension of all ceremonial and other dealings with foreigners. In the changed political atmosphere, with the temporary ascendancy of the Grand Secretary Yang T'ing-ho, and the general turn against eunuch influence, a decision to reject the embassy and forbid all relations with the Portuguese, already probable before the emperor's death, was a foregone conclusion. The embassy was hurried out of Peking by the Chinese the day after the emperor died, and arrived in Canton in September.

In April or May 1521, about five Portuguese ships and junks arrived at T'un-men and began trading. When news of the emperor's death arrived, all foreigners were ordered to leave the country at once. The Portuguese refused, since they had not finished assembling their export cargoes. The Chinese assembled a substantial squadron and attacked both the Portuguese and some junks from Siam and Patani that had Portuguese aboard. One ship was sunk, and many Portuguese and other foreigners were killed or taken prisoner. When two more Portuguese junks arrived in June, the Chinese attacked again but were beaten off. A lull then followed, but, in September, three Portuguese ships barely managed to beat off another attack and get away. Thus, by the time the Tomé Pires embassy arrived back in Canton on 22 September, 1521, these sea battles had reinforced the determination of the Ming authorities to exclude the Portuguese. The Chinese isolated the embassy party from the prisoners taken in the sea fights. The authorities made inventories, the Portuguese thought very dishonestly,¹¹ of the embassy's presents and of the trade goods taken from the captured ships.

¹⁰ There is a hint of this in the reference to close questioning of the interpreters in Peking; Barros and Couto, *Da Asia*, III.VI.1, p. 8.

¹¹ Ferguson, "Letters," p. 469.

The final chapter of this story was the arrival at T'un-men, in August 1522, of three ships under Martim Affonso de Mello Coutinho, who had a royal commission to conclude peace with China, and enough men to garrison a fort he hoped to establish, presumably with Chinese consent. The commanders of these ships knew nothing of the breakdown of relations, and lost two of their ships in an unexpected Chinese attack. The survivors managed to get away on the third ship after only fourteen days in Chinese waters. The prisoners taken in the sea fights were treated very harshly, put in cangues, and executed after the autumn assizes of 1523. Tomé Pires was forced to write letters to the King of Portugal, Viceroy of Portuguese India, and Governor of Melaka conveying the emperor's command that Melaka be returned to its rightful sovereign. He and his party were held hostage, to be released only when the Ming authorities were informed that the Portuguese had returned Melaka to its legitimate ruler. Pires died in 1524. Two of his party were still alive in 1534–36, sending letters to Melaka and Goa full of good information and of wild plans for the conquest of Canton.¹² The Ming authorities mustered fleets every year until 1528 to guard against the return of the Portuguese. The taxed, nontribute trade that had flourished in the Cheng-te reign was prohibited in Kwangtung to all foreigners, and Southeast Asian trade shifted to illegal entrepôts in the Chang-chou area of Fukien, to the great detriment of Kwangtung's revenues and commercial economy. Even after Kwangtung's taxed nontributary trade was re-opened in 1530, the Portuguese were completely excluded.

These episodes had attracted a good deal of attention in the Canton area, and set there a tone of fear and contempt toward the Portuguese that persisted throughout the flourishing of Macao. To judge by surviving Chinese sources, the Portuguese left only fragmentary and ambiguous impressions among the court and the high bureaucratic elite. Their cannon and ships, however, were appreciated: one ship was built in Portuguese style in the Canton Estuary, and one official, Wang Hung, made a name for himself promoting the copying and use of Portuguese-style cannon as far away as the Great Wall forts. The Portuguese were known in the records of this time as Fo-lang-chi, after the Indian-Southeast Asian term “ferengi”, a term which referred to any Latin Christian and which ultimately derived from the Franks of the Crusades. Because the word “Chi” also meant “device”, the same characters were used to denote the cannon, and soon, some were confused as to whether the Fo-lang-chi were guns or people. In the *Ming-shih* account of the Portu-

12 Armando Cortesão, in his introduction to the *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires (London, 1944), pp. xlvii–xlvi, argues that these letters were written in 1524. See, however, Ferguson, “Letters”, p. 478 for a clear reference in one of these letters to the maintenance of defense fleets along the coast until 1528.

guesse and in a few of its sources, one of the foreign hangers-on in the emperor's corrupt entourage, Huo-che-ya-san, appears as the Portuguese ambassador or interpreter; this probably is a confusion involving someone from Hami or Turfan, but may reflect some kind of intrigue involving a Melakan Chinese interpreter, possibly even the renegade who told all about the bogus "tribute memorial."¹³

FROM LIAMPO TO MACAO, 1530–1572

The débâcle of the 1520s thrust the Portuguese back into the margins of Southeast Asian trade with China, so that they traveled as individuals on Southeast Asian shipping and eventually sent their own ships to the ports where the Melakans, Siamese, and others traded. There are stray references in the 1530s to royal or viceregal grants of voyages to China, and the first Portuguese ship to reach Japan, in 1542, was blown there on a voyage to "Liampo", presumably the Shuang-yü trading center on Lien-kang Island in the Chou-shan Archipelago on the Chekiang coast. In the 1540s this area became a flourishing center for illegal or semi-legal trade between China and Japan, and between China and Southeast Asia. Portuguese also were involved in the illicit trade centered on Yueh-kang harbor in the Chang-chou estuary of Fukien, the "Chincheo" of the European sources, and on the nearby island of Wu-yü. This illicit trade was, in a way, a revival of the marginally legal trade carried out on the Kwangtung coastal islands during the Cheng-te period, and it similarly served to quarantine dangerous foreigners far away from the major cities. But because these trading centers had no legal sanction and no official presence, they were even more prone to violence and more vulnerable to government hostility than the earlier centers had been.

In the rise and fall of these centers the Portuguese were not so much independent actors as they were marginal participants in a Sino-Japanese process.¹⁴ Reports of illegal trade, and of the piracy that sometimes accompanied it, finally led in July 1547 to the appointment of Chu Wan as a special Grand Coordinator with wide authority to stamp out smuggling and lawlessness on the Chekiang and Fukien coasts. In November 1547, Chu already was investigating the situation in the Chang-chou area and recommending measures to improve defenses and to control the activities of the coastal Chinese.¹⁵ In April 1548, he was in Hangchow coping with the irregu-

13 Paul Pelliot, "Le Hoja et le Sayyid Husain de l'Histoire des Ming," *T'oung Pao*, 38 (1948), pp. 81–292.

14 For an excellent summary and full citations of sources, see Jurgis Elisonas, "The inseparable trinity: Japan's relations with China and Korea." In *Early Modern Japan*, Vol. 4, ed. John Whitney Hall and assistant ed. James McLain, *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 235–300.

15 DMB, pp. 373–75; *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, pp. 494–95.

larities of the Japanese embassy under Sakugen Shuryō and assembling forces for an all-out assault on Shuang-yü. From April to June of that year the Shuang-yü area was occupied and devastated. Chinese sources report only a few hundred casualties, and there is no reliable record of any Portuguese casualties; clearly many Chinese and foreign ships and traders had managed to get away. It was very convenient for the denizens of Shuang-yü that this attack came just at the beginning of the south monsoon, the season for departures of trading ships to Japan. Given the conspicuous preparations for an attack on their island bases, it cannot have been too difficult for the outlaw traders to assemble export cargoes and get their ships and people out of harm's way.

Chu Wan already had been in Fukien in 1547 and had ordered measures to cut off illegal trade there. He returned there in the summer of 1548, undeterred by rising opposition to his policies and a reduction of his authority in August. The Portuguese trading on the Fukien coast that summer at first found their trade almost entirely cut off, but later were able to bribe some of the coastal commanders and obtain their export cargoes. Lin Hsi-yüan, a former high official now deeply involved in maritime trade, apparently had abetted their trade by various maneuvers to delay enforcement of Chu's rigid orders and by arguing that the Portuguese had traded peacefully for the previous five years and had even helped the authorities attack a pirate.¹⁶ Early in 1549, Portuguese traders, probably coming from Japan, found it impossible to trade, and left their goods in the hands of Chinese agents. In February or March, one or two junks were lured to the shore and attacked at Tsou-ma-ch'i in Chao-an near the Fukien-Kwangtung border. Several hundred were killed on the spot or died soon afterwards; ninety-six prisoners were taken to Ch'üan-chou, where Chu Wan ordered the Chinese among them executed. Four Portuguese prisoners were labelled as kings or princes of Melaka. Chu's executions on his own authority, especially those not at the scene of the battle, were just what his enemies needed to secure his downfall; he was dismissed and imprisoned, and apparently committed suicide. The fraud of the "Melakan nobles" was uncovered, leaving the Portuguese very much impressed with the thoroughness and impartiality of Chinese justice. The Portuguese spent several years in exile in various parts of China, and some eventually joined the Portuguese who were trading on the Kwangtung coast.¹⁷

The downfall of Chu Wan was followed by years of upheaval and anti-pirate campaigns on the coasts of Chiangnan, Chekiang, and Fukien. Looking

16 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, pp. 43–47.

17 Charles R. Boxer, ed. and trans., *South China in the sixteenth century, being the Narratives of Galeote Pereira, Fr. Gaspar da Cruz, O.P., Fr. Martin de Rada, OESA* (London, 1953), pp. xxvi–xxxvii, 190–211.

for peaceful trade, the Portuguese turned again to the coast of Kwangtung. Everywhere along the Chinese coast, old restrictions were shattered, and military men, sometimes in alliance with elements of the local elite, were very influential. This was the changed situation in which the Portuguese partially overcame the legacy of their first rupture in the 1520s and worked out an astonishingly useful and durable accommodation of Chinese and Portuguese interests – Macao. Several early sources say that the officials allowed the Portuguese to settle at Macao in 1557.¹⁸ By the 1620s, the Portuguese of Macao had built up an elaborate story of the extermination, by the Portuguese, in 1557, of a large force of pirates that had occupied Macao, and of the consequent cession of Macao, by the Emperor, to Portuguese sovereignty, confirmed by a “golden chop” preserved in the Macao city hall. However, the Macao authorities repeatedly acknowledged that the Chinese state retained ultimate sovereignty over Macao, and we will see that some elements of this foundation myth probably are reflections of well-documented events in 1564–65. Still better documented is the first phase of the acceptance of the Portuguese, which occurred before 1557.

Portuguese private trade on islands off the Kwangtung coast probably had begun immediately after the débâcles in Chekiang and Fukien in 1548 and 1549. The first initiative toward a more formal presence was taken by the Viceroy at Goa in 1552, with the dispatch, at the suggestion of Saint Francis Xavier, of one Diogo Pereira as ambassador to China. The Portuguese governor at Melaka did not allow Pereira to proceed beyond that point, perhaps out of fear that he might intrude on the dominance of Melaka merchants in Portuguese trade with Japan and China. Xavier, who had accompanied Pereira and had hoped to gain entrance to China in connection with the embassy, went on without it and died on Shang-ch’uan island off the Kwangtung coast a few months later.

A much more successful initiative was taken by a private Portuguese merchant named Leonel de Sousa, who also arrived on the Kwangtung coast in 1552. His own letter of 1556 is our main source of information about this episode and one of the most important documents in the history of Sino-Portuguese relations.¹⁹ Sousa’s success was a result of his own recognition, consonant with his own preoccupation with trade and his distance from the absurd bellicosity of the first generations of Portuguese in Asia, that profitable

18 One of the earliest surviving references to this date is that of Mendes Pinto; Fernão Mendes Pinto, *The travels of Mendes Pinto*, ed. and trans. Rebecca D. Catz (Chicago and London, 1989), p. 508.

19 This letter first was published in 1910 by Jordão de Freitas. See Freitas, *Macau: Materiais para a Sua História no Século XVI* (originally published in *Arquivo Historico Portuguez*, Vol. VIII, Lisbon, 1910; rpt., Macau, 1988), pp. 8–14. See also the excellent general account of this period in J. M. Braga, *The Western pioneers and their discovery of Macao* (Macao, 1949).

trade with China would require accommodation with Chinese interests and authorities, especially in view of the violent reputation the Portuguese had acquired in the past. He was very lucky to find a counterpart equally distant from past Chinese preoccupations who was ready to work out a local accommodation. This person was “the haitao,” the vice-commissioner for the maritime defense circuit, Wang Po, who is identified in Chinese sources as having accepted bribes from the Portuguese, as having allowed them to land their goods “to dry them out,” and as having allowed them to pay taxes and to trade at Canton. In 1552, Sousa learned that all foreigners were being allowed by the Chinese to trade upon payment of duties “except the Farangi, who were people with filthy hearts . . . whom they took for pirates.”²⁰ He urged the other Portuguese trading in the area to keep the peace, secured their agreement to pay duties if they were allowed to trade, and arranged to “change their name” so that they would no longer be identified with the hated Farangi. He told Wang Po they would pay only 10 percent duty; Wang said that the imperial duty was 20 percent, but that he would accommodate them, for the time being, by levying that duty on only half their goods. Many Portuguese went to Canton and traded there with no difficulty, concealing so many of their goods from the tax collectors that they paid duty on only about one-third of them. Wang was received ceremoniously on the Portuguese ships, to his great satisfaction. He granted Sousa jurisdiction over the people on all sixteen ships, Portuguese and Southeast Asian, that were trading in the area. In all this, Sousa was helped by a wealthier merchant, Simão d’Almeida, who got things done much more quickly by giving gifts to Wang Po and his subordinates. It may have been at this time that it was agreed that the vice-commissioner for the maritime circuit would be paid 500 taels per year; according to Macao local tradition, this remained a private payment to “the haitao” until 1571 or 1572, when, the payment being made in the presence of other officials, a quick-witted commissioner saved himself from suspicion by identifying it as a “ground rent” payment to the imperial treasury for the settlement at Macao.²¹ When Simão d’Almeida left, Wang suggested that an embassy be sent to regularize the status of the Portuguese. Thus, when Sousa sailed for Melaka in the fall of 1554, secure foundations had been laid for the accommodation of the Portuguese on the Kwangtung coast, without any reference to the court in Peking or to any aspect of its policies other than the taxation of foreign trade.

Between 1552 and 1557 there was a gradual shift of the center of Portuguese activity from Shang-ch’uan, where Saint Francis Xavier had found Portuguese trading in 1552, to “Lampacao” (Lang-pai-ao), farther east and much

20 Freitas, *Macao*, pp. 8–9.

21 Freitas, *Macao*, pp. 20–21.

closer in shore, and on to Macao. The best description from this period is provided by the Jesuit, Belchior Nunes, who spent the winter of 1555–56 at Lampacao on his way to Japan.²² There were 300–400 Portuguese there that winter, in rude thatched dwellings, so disorderly that the Jesuits had all they could do to keep them from killing each other. Father Belchior went to Canton, probably along with Portuguese merchants trading there, in a vain attempt to procure the release from captivity of a Portuguese captured in Fukien several years earlier.

It was estimated that by 1562 there were 800–900 Portuguese at Macao. They had two modest churches and some houses more comfortable and substantial than the straw sheds of Lampacao. Saint Francis Xavier had written to the Viceroy at Goa deploring the blocking, at Melaka, of Diogo Pereira's embassy and urging that it be sent; this finally was done, and Pereira reached Macao in 1563. Initial reactions by the Canton officials suggested that Pereira's embassy might be accepted as a tribute embassy; the presents were very carefully checked, and a high official who came to Macao to check on it seemed very pleased by his splendid reception. The officials suggested that some additional present be sent from Goa, including two elephants, and the Jesuits took this suggestion seriously enough to write to Goa urging compliance. But nothing came from Goa; after "many delays," finally, the Chinese authorities asked two key questions. Had the Portuguese brought the document given to the previous embassy? (This probably referred to the order to the Portuguese to give up Melaka.) Why had they taken Melaka? Given these questions, which seem to have come some time in 1565, it was clear that the embassy was not going to be received. Macao would continue to develop completely outside the rules and precedents of the tribute system.²³

MACAO AND NAGASAKI, 1572–1640

Between 1572 and 1590 an institutional framework emerged, both in the Kwangtung bureaucracy and within the little Portuguese settlement, that made Macao controllable and tolerable in the view of the Chinese bureaucracy. These developments are very poorly documented in Chinese sources, and the Portuguese sources on them are largely second- or third-hand, but the general institutional pattern seems clear enough, and its efficacy in actual operation can be seen in many well-documented instances from later decades. We have almost no evidence on connections with Chinese political contexts,

22 *Cartas que os Padres e Irmãos da Companhia de Iesus escreverão dos Reynos de Iapão and China*, 2 vols. (Evora, 1598; rpt. Tenri, Japan, 1972), Vol. 1, fols. 32v–37.

23 Freitas, *Macao*, pp. 30–35.

but it may be useful to notice that these developments began during the years of Chang Chü-cheng's efforts at fiscal reform and revived central control, and continued at a time when there was a sharp decline in administrative energy at the center of Chinese government but still many instances of competence and reforming energy in the provinces. In sharp contrast to the Fukien bureaucracy's conflicts with Manila, the Dutch, and the Chinese merchants of Hai-ch'eng after 1600, there is no evidence that the activities of eunuch tax collectors and mining intendants caused any substantial difficulty in Macao-Kwangtung relations.

We already have noticed that what had been a customary bribe became designated a fixed ground rent payment in 1571 or 1572. The next step, and a crucial one, was taken in 1573, when a wall and gate, the "Circle Gate" (*porta do Cerco*), were erected at a narrow point on the peninsula on which Macao stands, and the Portuguese and other foreigners were forbidden to go beyond it.²⁴ Almost no agricultural land was left on the Macao side of the barrier. Macao, thus, was instantly and permanently reduced to dependence on a food supply which the Chinese officials could cut off at any time.

Further steps toward regularization of Macao's status were taken in the next decade. Although it is clear that the Portuguese had been trading at Canton long before this, it is likely that, as their trade grew, new regulations were worked out for their trade at the two annual "fairs" there.²⁵ In 1582, the Jesuit, Alonso Sanchez, came from Manila to announce the accession of Philip II of Spain to the Crown of Portugal: news that was far from welcome to the Portuguese of Macao, but which did not really have much effect on their control of the local situation. Nonetheless, Ch'en Jui, the governor-general of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, became suspicious, and summoned representatives of Macao to his seat of government at Chao-ch'ing. At first, say our sources, the representatives were severely reprimanded for using foreign laws to govern themselves on Chinese territory, but, later, explanations and gifts did their work.²⁶ It probably was after this confrontation that the attorney (*procurador*) at Macao was recognized by the Kwangtung authorities as "supervisor of foreigners" (*i-mu*) there.²⁷ Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the Portuguese residents felt the need to formalize, as far as possible, their right to govern themselves, dealing with the Chinese offi-

24 Yin Kuang-jen and Chang Ju-lin, *Ao-men chi-lueh* (n.p., 1751), 1, pp. 2, 23.

25 T'ien-tse Chang, *Sino-Portuguese Relations from 1514 to 1644* (Leiden, 1933, rpt. Leiden, 1969), pp. 102-03.

26 Sir Andrew Ljungstedt, *An historical sketch of the Portuguese settlements in China* (Boston, 1836), p. 79; George H. Dunne, S.J., *Generation of giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the last decades of the Ming dynasty* (Notre Dame, 1982), pp. 19-22.

27 T'ien-tse Chang, *Sino-Portuguese relations*, p. 101.

cials as they saw fit, and minimizing interference from their overlords in Goa or in distant and alien Madrid. In 1583, an assembly of residents presided over by the Bishop agreed to petition the authorities in Goa and Madrid for the grant of a formal charter of municipal government.²⁸ A charter granting Macao all the privileges of the City of Evora in Portugal was granted by the Viceroy in Goa in 1586 and confirmed by the King in 1595.²⁹

The municipal government thus established had elaborate customary procedures for the indirect election of three aldermen, two magistrates, and the attorney, who formed the famous Loyal Senate (*Leal Senado*). Every three years, three pairs of electors were chosen by a presiding magistrate or judge after consultation with all citizens. Each pair of electors then compiled a list of three names for each office to be filled. These lists were sorted by the presiding officer into three lists for the three years, each of which was sealed in a ball of wax, and the balls of wax placed in a bag in a locked chest. On New Year's Eve or New Year's Day, one of those lists was drawn at random by a small boy, and the individuals listed in it were to hold office for the next year; vacancies owing to death or absence were filled by election at that time. Former magistrates and other worthy people would be summoned to a general assembly, especially in crises in municipal finance or relations with the Chinese.³⁰

Thus, decision-making power was almost entirely in the hands of a resident merchant oligarchy with a vested interest in the long-run survival and prosperity of Macao, who knew how to deal with the Chinese authorities and knew, despite the indignant trumpeting of captains-major and captains-general about Portuguese honor and craven submission to the mandarins, that Macao was completely at the mercy of the Chinese state. Any time they forgot, the Chinese officials would bring them to their senses by leaving the gate closed for a few weeks. The merchant oligarchy also administered the Holy House of Mercy (*Santa Casa de Misericórdia*), a powerful lay brotherhood for charity that cared for many of the poor and the sick and invested its capital, derived from bequests, in Macao's maritime trade. The city expressed its Catholic piety in large and fervent processions and in the support of its many churches, monasteries, and convents and many missionaries. The most powerful religious establishment, that of the Jesuits, was a great asset in diplomacy with the Chinese, and controlled so much wealth that it became a major investor in foreign trade.

28 C. A. Montalto de Jesus, *Historic Macao* (Hong Kong, 1902), pp. 36–37.

29 The most reliable source for this is *Instrução para o Bispo de Pequim, e Outros Documentos para a História de Macau* (Lisbon, 1943), p. 142.

30 Charles R. Boxer, *Portuguese society in the tropics: the Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia, and Luanda, 1510–1800* (Madison and Milwaukee, 1965), pp. 6–7, 42–71, 167–76.

Between 1590 and 1610, Macao was at the heyday of its prosperity, serving as a key linking point between the growing worldwide network of European sea routes and the overheated energies of the economy and society of late Ming China, and playing an especially crucial role in the export of raw silk and silk fabrics to Japan in return for large quantities of silver.³¹ Despite the benefits of this trade, there was much about Macao that made the people of Kwangtung very uneasy. Any Chinese who went there found the streets full of strange-looking people of all types and colors: European Portuguese and slaves and mestizos from all around the Indian Ocean. The alien architecture, the religious processions, the ringing of the church bells, all told him he was not in China. The streets were unsafe at night, and sometimes even in broad daylight. Elsewhere in Kwangtung, the presence of Catholic converts in many localities probably aroused antagonism, which, in turn, affected attitudes toward Macao. Episodes of African slaves escaping from their Portuguese masters into Kwangtung were another source of aversion. Already, around 1580, Matteo Ricci had discovered that he had to carefully disassociate himself from Macao if he wanted to be welcomed by the Kwangtung elite. Around 1600, an anonymous member of the Kwangtung elite³² was quoted as saying that Macao no longer was part of Kwangtung.³³

In the 1590s, Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea distracted court attention from the south coast, but reinforced perceptions of the Japanese as dangerous enemies. Thereafter, Japanese expansion of trade with Southeast Asia, probes toward Taiwan, and the Satsuma conquest of the Ryukyus in 1609, shifted attention back toward possible Japanese threats on the south coast. At the same time, around 1600, court-centered factional strife was echoed very strongly in local struggles between eunuch mine and tax commissioners, and out-of-power officials involved in the politics of their home areas and frequently allied with merchant interests. The revived perception of a Japanese threat enhanced Macao's attractiveness as a neutral channel for obtaining Japanese silver without allowing Japanese on the Chinese coast or worrying about Chinese traders to Japan colluding with the Japanese. This attractiveness, however, could be very easily offset by any hint that the Portuguese were tolerating a Japanese presence in Macao.

For policy toward Macao in those years, a key figure was Tai Yao, governor-general of Kwangtung and Kwangsi from 1597 to 1610. The *Ming-shih* blames him and the lesser officials for "valuing the precious goods [of the Portuguese], pretending to forbid but secretly permitting . . . allowing the

31 See William Atwell's chapter in this volume for full analysis.

32 Jonathan D. Spence, *The memory palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking, 1984), pp. 192–93.

33 Shen Yu-jung, et al., *Min-hai tseng-yen*, No. 56 of *T'ai-wan wen-hsien ts'ung-k'an* (Taipei, 1959), p. 34.

evil to continue to grow.”³⁴ Tai was a native of Ch’ang-t’ai county in Chang-chou, Fukien, and it is likely that connections with the Fukien traders who had been in the Macao area longer than the Portuguese influenced his attitudes. Tai was praised for reducing taxes and labor services; there even was a reduction in the tax quota on Macao’s trade in 1606.³⁵ It also is important to notice that in 1600 Chang Ta-yu, the magistrate of Hsiang-shan county, in which Macao was located, managed to prevent an attempt by the eunuch tax commissioner, Li Feng, to settle in Hsiang-shan, arguing that “the nature of the foreigners is unfathomable; if by any chance they should attack the bearer of imperial orders, what could be done [to avoid an insult to] the awesome virtue of the Court?”³⁶

In Tai Yao’s years in power, events and rumors repeatedly reinforced Chinese negative attitudes toward Macao, but no changes in policy resulted. In 1598 the Spanish of Manila attempted to establish their own trading post in the Canton Estuary. They were well received in Canton, spent about 7,000 reals on presents, and were told they could establish themselves at a place they called El Piñal, “Pine Grove,” the location of which is unknown. The Portuguese, having failed to persuade the Canton authorities that they should exclude the Spanish, took direct action, launching an unsuccessful fireship attack, but desisted after the Chinese reduced Macao’s food supply. Later, they attacked a storm-damaged Spanish ship elsewhere in the estuary. When a larger ship came from Manila to El Piñal in 1599, the Macanese reportedly traded with it. Nevertheless, the Spanish did not leave anyone behind at El Piñal at the end of that trading season, and did not repeat the experiment.³⁷

In 1601, when the first Dutch ship to appear in Chinese waters anchored near Macao, the Portuguese captured a party sent to sound the coastal waters and executed seventeen of the twenty Dutch captives. The Ming authorities might have learned from both this and the El Piñal episode that the Portuguese presence at Macao was likely to conflict with the presence of other foreigners to their coasts. They inferred otherwise. The Chinese considered Macao to be controllable when necessary, and perhaps, even of some use in controlling other foreigners. The Dutch probe is noted in Ming records, but there is no trace in them of the El Piñal events.

Signs of Japanese infiltration at Macao and the effects of the tricky relations among Japanese, Jesuits, and Portuguese in this period were much more wor-

34 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, pp. 62.

35 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, pp. 52–53, 62–63.

36 Chou Ching-lien, *Chung-P’u chiao-i’ung shih*, p. 93.

37 Charles R. Boxer, *The Great Ship from Amcon: Annals of Macao and the Old Japan Trade* (Lisbon, 1959; rpt., Macao, 1988), pp. 61–2; Barros and Couto, *Da Asia*, XII.II.XI; Antonio de Morga, ed. and trans. J.S. Cummins, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (London, 1971), pp. 136–38, 148–49.

risome to the Chinese. New fortifications of Macao, stimulated especially by the likelihood that the Dutch would return, alarmed the Chinese; the Portuguese might be less controllable if they were better able to defend themselves. The great Jesuit church of São Paulo, which was built in these years and on which much of the work was done by Japanese Christian artisans, looked to the Chinese very much like a fortification. Even more alarming was the rise of a thick-walled Jesuit church on Ilha Verde (Ch'ing-chou), a small island at the inner end of Macao's Inner Harbor. The Portuguese were ordered to destroy their buildings on Ilha Verde, and some walls may have been pulled down. Then, in 1606, the people of nearby regions of Kwangtung were alarmed by rumors that the Portuguese planned to invade China, relying on Japanese and Malay auxiliaries and on the many Chinese who would join them. It was said that the invaders planned to set up the Jesuit, Father Lazaro Cattaneo, as emperor. There was rioting in Macao, and a Chinese Christian was tortured to death as a spy in Canton. In 1607, Dutch ships, attempting to trade not far from Macao, were treated very warily by the Chinese because of rumors that they had two hundred Japanese warriors aboard. At that time, the Portuguese chased them away. Then, in 1608, it seemed that the worst fears of the Chinese had come true. Japanese sailors and warriors returning from a trading voyage to Vietnam walked through the streets of Macao heavily armed, and finally, serious fighting broke out in which many of the Japanese were killed.³⁸

The Portuguese had had to tread warily in dealing with the Japanese intruders because they were closely connected with the powerful Nagasaki officials on whom Portuguese trade in Japan depended. The 1608 incident led directly to a series of conflicts at Nagasaki in 1609–10 that ended in the blowing up of the great ship *Madre de Deus*, but at Macao the violence did not continue. In 1606, a Cantonese scholar in Peking for the metropolitan examination had proposed that the “various foreigners” be moved from Macao to Lampacao, but his proposal had been rejected.³⁹ Debate revived after Chang Ming-kang replaced Tai Yao as governor-general in 1610. Some advocated driving the Portuguese away entirely. We have a full text of the memorial of one Kuo Shang-pin, advocating the expulsion of all Japanese and blacks and ordering the Portuguese to leave Macao and “trade at Lampacao as before,” which probably implies no permanent settlement. With its references to Portuguese evasions of customs duties and harboring of Japanese, blacks, and Chinese desperadoes, Kuo's memorial is the fullest reflection we have of

38 Charles R. Boxer, *The Christian century in Japan: 1540–1650* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1951), pp. 269–71, 287–88; and his *Fidalgos*, pp. 53–54; see below on the Dutch voyages.

39 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, p. 61; Chou Ching-lien, *Chung-P'u wai-chiao shih*, p. 95.

Ming negative attitudes toward Macao. In 1613, according to a Portuguese translation of a lost Chinese text, Macao was forced to expel ninety-eight Japanese and was forbidden to allow any more to come.⁴⁰ Beyond that, Governor-General Chang did not accept Kuo's drastic proposals, arguing that it was easier to control the Portuguese where they were, because there were Ming troops close by on several sides and because the Chinese exercised easy control over the city's food supply. Late in 1614, Chang sent officials to proclaim a full set of regulations which the Portuguese were to obey to the letter in the future. They were engraved on a stone tablet which was set up in front of the hall of the Loyal Senate, probably in 1617: the date given in an accurate Portuguese summary. Their five points were: 1) Macao must not harbor Japanese. 2) The buying of Chinese people is forbidden. 3) All ships, including warships, must pay duties and must come into Macao's Inner Harbor. Anchoring and trading in the outer islands is strictly forbidden. 4) Trade must be conducted at Canton, not at Macao, and duties on goods must be paid there. 5) New construction in Macao is strictly forbidden; old structures may be repaired or rebuilt to match their previous condition. These regulations, and their revisions and expansions in the 1740s, were fundamental to Chinese policy toward Macao down to the nineteenth century; they were Macao's charter for survival through submission.⁴¹

For the next few years tension focused on Portuguese building in Macao, especially of anything that could be viewed as a fortification. In 1621, the Jesuits were forced to demolish their church on Ilha Verde, and the Ming garrison at the Circle Gate was strengthened somewhat and placed under a higher-ranking officer.⁴² In 1622, the Dutch attempted to conquer Macao and were driven off by a lucky shot into a Dutch powder barrel and a wild charge of Portuguese and slaves onto the beach where the Dutch had landed.⁴³ We have *nothing* in Chinese on this episode, but we do have a Jesuit report on a defense of Macao that they insisted had been offered in the capital by the distinguished convert Ignatius Sun Yüan-hua. Sun argued, according to the Jesuits, that the City of Macao had maintained peace with the Chinese for many years and had offered its cannoneers for service against the Manchus (see below). Now, however, the seas were full of European pirates (referring to the Dutch). That Macao had been built was the fault of those who had been enticed by petty profits and had permitted it, "but, at present, there

40 *Instrução para o Bispo de Pequim*, pp. 115–16, mis-dated 1579 but with the correct date of Wan-li 41 in the text.

41 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, pp. 64–67; Yin and Chang, *Ao-men chi-lüeh*, 1:25a–b; *Instrução para o Bispo de Pequim*, pp. 116–18.

42 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, p. 68; Yin and Chang, *Ao-men chi-lüeh*, 1:1a–b.

43 Boxer, *Fidalgo*, ch. 5.

was no other way to defend the empire on that side against the Dutch pirates."⁴⁴ Another clue to the reactions of provincial officials is to be found in a Portuguese document of 1623, which tells us that in the course of efforts to persuade the Ming authorities to allow the Macanese to keep some new fortifications, "more bribes were given and some mandarins came to see the great ships of the enemy and the dead who lay on the field of battle, from which they took some heads back to Canton to prove that the walls we wanted to build were only to defend the city which was the territory of the King of China."⁴⁵ A Chinese text states, however, that the Chinese did force the destruction of some walls in these years.⁴⁶

Macao may have won some toleration for itself by obediently expelling the Japanese and by fending off the Dutch, but when the Portuguese sought to solidify their position by sending troops to aid the Ming against the rising Manchu power, they encountered much more intricate political difficulties. In 1623, the distinguished Catholic converts, Hsü Kuang-ch'i and Li Chih-tsao, proposed that the Portuguese should train Ming soldiers in the use of cannon. A small group of Portuguese artillery men was brought to Peking, but at one of their demonstrations a cannon exploded, killing a Portuguese and three Chinese. Shen Ch'üeh and other opponents of the Jesuits and their converts took this opportunity to denounce this effort, and soon the gunners were sent back to Macao. In 1630, a small group of gunners again was sent, and apparently participated effectively in the defense of Cho-chou against a Manchu attack. Now, the project expanded to include the enlistment of several hundred Macao soldiers to serve the Ming. They got as far as Nanch'ang in Kiangsi, then were turned back; they may have been stopped by the efforts of the Kwangtung trading interest and its bureaucratic allies, who did not want the Portuguese to have any channels of trade and communication in China which they did not control. A few of these soldiers went on to join the garrison of Teng-chou, Shantung, where most of them were killed in the revolt of K'ung Yu-te in 1632.⁴⁷

Macao's ambivalent relations with the people and officials of Kwangtung rarely imperilled its survival or even its prosperity. The main determinant of the latter was the attitude of the Japanese toward Catholicism and, by exten-

44 Anonymous, attributed to V.P. Kirwitzer, S.J., *Histoire de ce qui s'est Passé au Royaume de la Chine en l'Année 1624* (Paris, 1629), pp. 22–24.

45 "Relação sobre a fundação e fortificação de Macau," 27 November, 1623, published in Francisco Paulo Mendes da Luz, *O Conselho da Índia: Contributo ao Estudo da História da Administração e do Comércio do Ultramar Português nos Principios do Século XVII* (Lisbon, 1952), pp. 606–16, at pp. 614–15.

46 Chou Ching-lien, *Chung-P'u wai-chiao shih*, p. 89; Yin and Chang, *A'o-men chi-lieh*, 2:22b–23.

47 Charles R. Boxer, "Portuguese military expeditions in aid of the Mings against the Manchus, 1621–1647," *T'ien-ssia Monthly*, 7:1 (August 1938), pp. 24–30; DMB, pp. 414, 1147; Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 215–18.

sion, toward the Portuguese who always had been so closely associated with it. The spectacular rise of Macao had depended on the great desire of various territorial lords to attract the “black ships” to their realms, as well as on the expanding silver production that made their purchases of Chinese goods possible. This unambiguously hospitable phase had an early peak, in the granting of Nagasaki to the Society of Jesus in 1580. Signs of an anti-Christian reaction began with Hideyoshi’s edicts against Christians of 1587, and became really serious with the measures taken in 1612–14.⁴⁸ However, the Chinese, the Dutch, and the English still offered no adequate alternative channel of supply of Chinese goods to the burgeoning Japanese market. As late as the early 1630s, as the Japanese took increasingly severe measures to forbid their own maritime trade and to repress Catholicism, turmoil on the China coast and Dutch bungling of their relations with the Japanese inhibited the emergence of alternate sources of supply. About 1637, both the Dutch and their Chinese competitors and trading partners were settling down to peaceful trade. In a rapidly changing situation, the Portuguese were borrowing both in Japan and in China to maintain their competitive position, and their experience and established connections made them formidable rivals. It was not commercial change but the Shimabara rebellion of 1637 that doomed Portuguese trade in Japan and thereby doomed Macao to irremediable decline and poverty. The Portuguese were expelled from Japan in 1639 and forbidden to return, and when Macao sent an embassy in 1640 to plead for reconsideration, the entire party of officers, merchants, and seamen was executed.

Macao never recovered from the loss of this leading line of trade. Dutch attacks on Portuguese shipping in the Straits of Melaka were followed in 1641 by the Dutch conquest of Melaka, depriving Macao of a key link for its trade to India. Macao sent a party of soldiers to aid the Ming Loyalist Yung-li Emperor, and suffered severely from all the wars and dislocations of trade of the Ming-Ch’ing transition, but the blow from which it could not recover, and never did, was the loss of the Japanese trade.⁴⁹

MANILA

Chinese merchants had made trading voyages to the archipelago that became the Philippines long before the Spanish arrived. However, the Spanish-Chinese connection, and the expansion of Chinese settlement and enterprise

48 Boxer, *The great ship from Amacan*; also his *The Christian century in Japan, 1549–1650* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1951); Jurgis Elisonas, “Christianity and the daimyo.” In *Early Modern Japan*, Vol. 4, ed. John Whitney Hall and assistant ed. James McClain, *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge 1991), pp. 301–72.

49 On Macao from the late 1640s to the late 1660s see Wills, *Embassies and illusions*, pp. 83–101.

on Luzon owed little to those antecedents, and almost everything to the exchange, across the Pacific, of Chinese silks and other consumer goods for Spanish American silver. References to Chinese trade with Luzon can be found in the records of the first Spanish voyages to reach the archipelago: those of Magellan in 1521 and of Loaysa in 1527. It was a combination of a magnificent harbor, a rich agricultural hinterland, and an already established trade with China that brought the Spanish under the leadership of Miguel López de Legazpi to conquer Manila in 1570–71, to immediately establish there the full institutional framework of a Spanish city, and to move the Spanish headquarters in Asian waters to the new city. The local people had just begun to develop, under Muslim influence, large-scale monarchical institutions, and offered no sustained resistance to Spanish domination once the Spanish had burned the king's town and begun building a Spanish walled town in its place.⁵⁰

Already, there were Chinese settled in an area that had been granted them by the Muslim king, across the Pasig River from Manila, roughly in the Binondo area that was a frequent center of Chinese settlement from that time to our own day.⁵¹ Chinese awareness of the new opportunities at Manila and of the likelihood of a friendly reception was increased when Legazpi's ship rescued the crew of a disabled Chinese junk off Mindoro in 1571. Some of the rescued people came to Manila with a big cargo in 1572, and, in 1573, the first cargo of Chinese goods was sent off across the Pacific to Acapulco. Six junks came in 1574, twelve or more in 1575. It was precisely in these years that the exploitation of the great silver lode at Potosí in what is now Bolivia was getting well under way and a market for Chinese silks and other fine craft products was emerging in the settled and luxurious cities of Spanish America. The trade became Manila's overwhelming *raison d'être*; there was not even much done to explore the gold resources of Luzon or to develop the magnificent agricultural potential of the area around Manila. At Manila, the Chinese brought almost all the goods that would be shipped to the New World and did almost all the mercantile and skilled craft work of the city.

Before this process was well under way, the Spanish presence was nearly extinguished by a Chinese attack. This was followed by an abortive opening of direct relations with the Ming which seemed, for a short while, to present

50 Robert R. Reed, *Colonial Manila: The context of Hispanic urbanism and process of morphogenesis* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London), 1978.

51 On the Chinese at Manila good summaries and guides to the sources are William L. Schurz, *The Manila galleon* (New York, 1939, rpt. New York, 1959), ch. 1, and the various essays in Vol. 1 of Alfonso Felix, Jr., ed, *The Chinese in the Philippines, 1570–1770* (Manila, 1966). On the Chinese presence before the Spanish arrival see especially Alberto Santamaria, O.P., "The Chinese Parian (El Parian de los Sangleyes)." In *The Chinese in the Philippines*, Vol. 1, ed. A. Felix, pp. 67–118, at p. 106, citing testimony in 1640 of an aged son of the former King of Manila.

the possibility that Sino-Spanish trade might be centered not at Manila, but at a Spanish Macao on the coast of Fukien. The pirate, Lin Feng, had been driven off the Fukien coast in 1574 and had taken refuge in the P'eng-hu (Pescadores) Islands. His fleet entered Manila Bay on 29 November of that year, and a first landing was driven back on the next day. On 2 December, Lin himself, with about 1,000 men, led a larger attack, but it too was driven back and about 200 of his men were killed. He then withdrew from the Manila area and fortified himself at Pangasinan farther north on the coast of Luzon. In March 1575, a force of Spanish soldiers and Filipino auxiliaries pursued him there, burned his ships, almost took his stockade, and settled down to wait for his surrender. But Lin's men were able to get food and firewood from nearby settlements, and eventually assembled enough timber to clandestinely build thirty-seven small junks and escape out to sea.⁵²

Not long after the Spanish force arrived at Pangasinan it had been joined by a Ming officer, Wang Wang-kao, who had been sent to track down Lin Feng. The Spanish seemed to have the situation well in hand, so Wang was sent on to Manila, where he was very cordially received and soon set out for Fukien, taking with him two lay Spanish envoys, Miguel de Loarca and Pedro de Sarmiento, and two priests, Martin de Rada and Jerónimo Marin, who would seek to make a trade agreement with the Fukien authorities and to obtain permission to preach the Gospel in China. They were very cordially received in T'ung-an, in Ch'üan-chou, and finally by the governor of Fukien in Foochow. They were told that no answer could be given to their requests until the emperor's response to them had been received. As they sailed for Manila in September 1575, their Chinese hosts pointed out to them the little island of Wu-yü on the south side of the Chang-chou Estuary as one place where they might be given a trading post. In Chinese records their mission is recorded as a would-be tribute embassy, and it is said that they were given gifts and their presents were forwarded for them, but it is implied that they were not allowed to establish any more permanent relation because they "were not a tributary country," that is, they were not to be found in the early Ming lists of tributaries.⁵³ Returning to Manila with the envoys, Wang Wang-kao was dismayed to learn that Lin Feng had escaped. He was treated rudely by a new governor at Manila. The two priests still pressed him to take them back to Fukien, and they finally embarked on his ship, but were put ashore on northern Luzon.⁵⁴ As late as 1589 the Governor told Bishop Salazar he was trying to get an agreement with the Chang-chou officials for

⁵² DMB, pp. 917–19; Boxer, *South China in the sixteenth century*, pp. xlv–xlvii.

⁵³ Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, pp. 75–77.

⁵⁴ DMB, pp. 1131–36.

a trading post on an offshore island.⁵⁵ The 1593 prohibition of Spanish trade with China mentioned below should have put an end to these projects; the El Piñal episode, described previously in the Macao section, would seem to represent a final effort to dodge this restriction, and the unexplained end of the El Piñal foray expressive of the definitive enforcement of the prohibition. Thereafter, the Spanish settled down to mutually profitable, but uneasy and occasionally violent relations with the Chinese who came to Manila. The great massacres of 1603, 1639, and 1662 are relatively well-known and well-documented, but they must be set against a background of the organization and taxation of the Chinese community that still is not well known.

The history of the Chinese at Manila and of the very occasional attention paid them by the Ming authorities must be pulled together from very scattered sources. Only occasionally do the Seville archives yield detailed information on the types and quantities of goods imported from China. The figures on taxation of Chinese trade and on the head taxes paid by Chinese residents assembled by Pierre Chaunu are immensely valuable, but clearly tainted by changing collection practices and levels of corruption.⁵⁶ Raw silk and silk goods always were the mainstays of Chinese-Spanish trade. By 1586, concerns over the drain of specie into China, the tough and intelligent bargaining of individual Chinese traders, and the presence of large numbers of Chinese at Manila throughout the trading season, some of whom even stayed over to the next year, led the City of Manila to petition the King for the institution of the *pancada*, a procedure in which uniform prices for all Chinese imports were negotiated in advance of the beginning of the trading season; it received royal approval in 1589. Although it seems to have been a Spanish initiative, the *pancada* (the word is a Manila neologism of unknown origin) also met Chinese needs to dispose of all goods in time for the return voyage to Fukien and to keep the trade moving as smoothly as possible. It is likely that the leaders of the resident Chinese community were important middlemen in this negotiation, but no firm evidence has yet emerged on this point. In 1593, this restrictive policy was extended to limit the volume of trans-Pacific trade, to close Peru to Chinese imports, and to prohibit Spanish voyages to China and the importation of Chinese goods consigned to specific Spaniards. It seems likely that the *pancada* was never free of leaks. Soon it was confined to finer goods, and, by the late 1600s it had completely broken down and was replaced by a free-market *feria* (fair) after the Chinese ships arrived.

55 Bishop Domingo de Salazar, O.P., letter of 24 June, 1590, as reprinted in Felix, *The Chinese in the Philippines*, Vol. 1, p. 121.

56 Pierre Chaunu, *Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Ibériques (XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe siècles); Introduction méthodologique et indices d'activité* (Paris, 1960).

The large number of Chinese who settled in the Manila area was a more persistent concern. Already in 1586, it was estimated that there were 10,000 Chinese, compared to a Spanish population of less than 2,000. General prohibitions of Chinese retail trade and permanent residence were little enforced. It is not clear when the practice of selling residence permits to the Chinese began. Around 1600, the rule was that only 4,000 would be sold, for 2 reals each, but, by that time, the issue of the certificates had become a venal source of income, granted by the responsible officer to his cronies, who profited not only from the sale of certificates up to the quota and beyond, but from extra extortions: Chinese who were found without a permit after the annual trading ships departed had to buy one for six reals.⁵⁷ The result of this procedure was that the limit on the numbers of Chinese residents was only very erratically enforced, and this enforcement fell more on recent arrivals than on established Chinese merchants.

The first location of the Parian, as the Chinatown came to be called, was within the walls of the City. In 1583, the Chinese were moved to a swampy area northeast of the city walls. They rapidly turned this area into a thriving town of orderly streets with a large pond at its center. The pond was accessible to substantial ships and had an island in its center where punishments were administered to Chinese criminals. The Chinese were briefly moved from this location during various periods, and separate Christian Chinese settlements soon grew up in Tondo and Binondo north of the Pasig River, but the area described generally remained the prime center of Chinese settlement down to the nineteenth century. Traces of the location still are to be found in the name of the Parian Gate of Intramuros, the old walled city, and in Arroceros Street, the location of the street of the rice merchants in the Parian.⁵⁸ By 1590 the domination of local trade and artisanal production by the Chinese was striking, and included everything from bread-baking to book-binding, tavern-keeping, and stone-masonry. The Dominicans built their church in the vicinity of the Parian soon after their arrival in 1587 and soon were deeply involved in learning the Chinese language and seeking converts among this population, making intelligent use of pageantry, charity, and learning.⁵⁹ Earlier Chinese converts had been expected to adopt Spanish clothing and to cut their long hair. It is not clear how far the Dominicans modified these policies, but two of their letters from 1589 and 1590 show considerable interest

57 H. de la Costa, S.J., *The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1581–1768* (Cambridge, MA, 1961), pp. 205–06.

58 Santamaria, "The Chinese Parian." In *The Chinese in the Philippines*, Vol. 1, ed. A. Felix, pp. 67–118.

59 John E. Wills, Jr., "From Manila to Fuan: Asian contexts of Dominican Mission policy." In *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, ed. D. E. Mungello (Nettetal, 1994), pp. 111–27.

in the Chinese and willingness to consider the need to adapt to their culture.⁶⁰ The 1590 letter also gives us our first reference to a Christian Chinese “Don Juan Zanco, Governor of the Christian Chinese.”⁶¹ It is not clear if he was given any authority over his non-Christian countrymen, but it is likely that he was an important intermediary in their relations with the Spanish. In 1603, there was a royal confirmation of what seems to have been well-established practice by that time, namely, that a Christian Chinese was appointed mayor (*alcalde*, also referred to as *Capitan*) over all the Chinese, that the other regional mayors (*alcaldes*) had no jurisdiction over them, and that, in legal cases and other important matters, the mayor of the Chinese was required to seek the advice of the Crown Attorney (*fiscal*) of the Audiencia.⁶²

In 1593, the Chinese rowers of the galley of Governor Gomez Perez Das-mariñas mutinied and killed him. The mutineers headed west, most of them remaining on the Vietnam coast. Thirty-two of them reached China, however, where their deed was reported to the court and their leader was punished. At Manila, further attacks were feared and the local Chinese were forced to move their Parian to the north side of the Pasig. The appearance, in 1594, of seven Chinese warships, ostensibly searching for Chinese outlaws, heightened tension. Soon, the Chinese were allowed to move back across the river. In 1596, 12,000 were sent back to their homeland, but as many more remained.

In 1603, this stew of fear, mutual dependence, flourishing trade, and unstoppable immigration exploded in a massacre in which over 20,000 Chinese were killed. The catalyst was the arrival of an official mission sent by the Fukien provincial authorities. Two Fukien adventurers, Yen Ying-lung and Chang I, had told Kao Ts'ai, the notorious eunuch tax and mines commissioner in Fukien, that there was a mountain of gold on Cavite Peninsula in Manila Bay. It seems that plans were made for a mission, with Ming naval backing, to attack Manila or otherwise seek the mountain of gold. After a number of censors protested to no avail, the provincial authorities decided they had to send an expedition of some kind, but clearly planned it to show up Chang I's hoax. An assistant county magistrate, Wang Shih-ho, and a company commander, Yü I-ch'eng, were sent, bringing Chang I in chains, to check on the truth of his story.

The delegation arrived in March of 1603 and was promptly received by Governor Pedro Bravo de Acuña, their procession with its music, heralds, and standard bearers making a great impression. They were given comfort-

60 Reports by Bishop Salazar and Juan Cobo O.P. In *The Chinese in the Philippines*, Vol. 1, ed. A. Felix, pp. 119–142.

61 Salazar. In *The Chinese in the Philippines*, Vol. 1, ed. A. Felix, p. 129.

62 Milagros Guerrero, “The Chinese in the Philippines, 1570–1770.” In *The Chinese in the Philippines*, Vol. 1, ed. A. Felix, pp. 15–39, at pp. 30–31.

able accommodations. When they began to administer justice in the Chinese community they were immediately ordered to desist. At a second meeting with the Governor in May they made it clear that they were skeptical about Chang I's report but had to obey the commands of their emperor. The Governor then arranged that they should go to Cavite and see for themselves that there was no gold there. They did so, and soon left for China, taking with them a basket of earth from Cavite and the unfortunate Chang I, still in chains.⁶³

Unaware of the political tensions behind this expedition, the Spanish could not believe that the search for the mountain of gold had been its real purpose. Soon, rumors were spreading that it had been sent to spy out Manila for a major Chinese invasion, in which the local Chinese would cooperate. Defensive measures were taken, and many Spaniards, Filipinos, and resident Japanese began to threaten the Chinese. The established merchants of the Parian remained quiet and conciliatory, but new arrivals, especially settlers in the semi-rural areas north of the Pasig, were less well controlled, had less to lose, and probably were suffering more from the abuses of the license fee collection previously described. North of the river, a large group of Chinese began to plan a first strike, and some Parian residents began to join them. The mayor of the Parian, Juan Bautista de la Vera, whose Chinese name was transcribed as Eng Kang, tried to dissuade them, but found his adopted son in command of the rebels. They tried to persuade him to become their leader, but he escaped back to the Parian, promptly reporting the danger to the Spanish. When gunpowder was found in his house, possibly intended for fireworks, he was arrested and eventually executed.

On the night of 3 October the Spanish shut the gates of the walled city and prepared for an attack. North of the Pasig one Spanish family was killed and many houses were burned. A Chinese attack on the church in Tondo was beaten off by Spanish soldiers, who then foolishly pursued the Chinese into a swampy area and were surrounded and cut down. The rebels now rested, arguing among themselves and casting lots (probably the divining blocks still so ubiquitous in southern Fukien culture) to determine their next move. On 6 October, they crossed the Pasig, occupied the Parian, and prepared for an attack on the walled city, building ladders and rolling siege towers. They had taken some firearms from the Spaniards cut down in the swamp, but still were no match for the musket and cannon fire that now was trained on them from the walls of the city. Their disorderly assaults on

63 This account of the events of 1603 relies on De la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, pp. 203–15; Morga, *Sucesos*, pp. 206–25; Francisco Colin, S.J., *Labor Evangélica de la Compañía de Jesús en Filipinas*, ed. Pablo Pastells, S.J. (Barcelona, 1904), Vol. 2, pp. 428–32; and Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Folang-chi*, pp. 90–101.

the wall were broken up, their ladders and towers demolished by cannon balls. In a day or two, disciplined Spanish and Japanese soldiers began to mount sorties from the city, and as Filipino auxiliaries arrived from outlying areas, the Chinese broke and fled in any direction they could. They were pursued in the countryside during the following weeks, and whenever Spaniards or Filipinos caught up with them, no prisoners were taken. Estimates of the total number of Chinese slaughtered range from 15,000 to 25,000.

The Spanish now very quickly realized that, however much they feared and despised the Chinese, they could not survive without their trade and industry. Surviving Parian merchants were assured that the trade would continue as usual. The Manila authorities wrote to the rulers of Kwangtung and Fukien to explain what had happened. The Fukien officials were inclined to fix much of the blame on Chang I. They replied, according to the *Ming-shih*, that the Spanish should not have killed Chinese criminals on their own initiative and that they should send the widows and orphans back to China, but no chastising expedition was sent. Because so much of the Parian had been burned, Chinese merchants coming to trade in 1604 were lodged in fine houses in the walled city. The revival of the trade was so rapid that Chaunu's figures on taxes on Chinese trade suggest that the average value of the trade for 1606–10 were over 3 million pesos per year, the highest five-year average in the history of the trade.⁶⁴

Spanish jurisdiction over the Chinese community remained tangled and venal, with the governor supposedly having final jurisdiction and the Crown Attorney (*fiscal*) of the Audiencia serving as “protector” of the Chinese and adviser of their mayor on all legal matters. The Chinese were exempted from labor service and petty personal dues required of the Filipinos, but paid a very stiff license fee of 8 pesos per year, with added extortions and harassments by the sellers. Chinese resentment of Spanish extortion and misrule was manifested in a series of petitions to the king of Spain to allow them to be governed solely by their own people, which were rejected in 1630.⁶⁵ The sale of the licenses remaining a venal privilege of Spanish appointees, new efforts to limit the Chinese population to 6000 had no chance of success; estimates in the 1620s and 1630s ranged from 15,000 to 21,000, at the time of the 1639 revolt 33,000–45,000, the majority of them rural. The license fees became a greater source of government income than the tax on the trade of the Chinese.⁶⁶ A larger proportion of this population by now was

64 Based on Chaunu, *Les Philippines*, pp. 34, 92, dividing the average collection of 46,390 pesos by the 3 percent rate and doubling to allow for untaxed and undertaxed trade.

65 Charles H. Cunningham, *The Audiencia in the Spanish colonies, as illustrated by the Audiencia of Manila (1583–1800)* (Berkeley, 1919), p. 253.

66 Chaunu, *Les Philippines*, p. 92.

engaged in farming in outlying areas, on their own, on estates of the religious orders, and, in at least one case, in a forced settlement project. It was these rural Chinese who rose against the Spanish and brought another massacre down on their heads in 1639.

The 1639 rebellion of the Chinese of Luzon was largely a rural affair, which only briefly occupied the Manila Parian and threatened the Spanish walled city. It was ill-armed, but well-organized; Spanish soldiers searching camps from which they had expelled the Chinese found large stocks of rice, written notice boards, and evidence of thorough organization into squads of ten, kept track of by cash-like counters collected at the end of each fighting day. The uprising must have been in preparation for some time in its rural centers. There were rumors, not very detailed or convincing, that the leaders were in touch with Cheng Chih-lung and that a coordinated rising had been planned for 24 December, but was botched by the earlier rural rising. This took place on 20 November at Calamba, on the south shore of Laguna de Bay east of Manila, where a large number of Chinese, probably several thousand, were engaged in developing paddy rice agriculture. Many of them had been compelled to settle there, and all paid a substantial rent to the Spanish Crown. The site was very unhealthy: about 300 of them had died. The rebels advanced rapidly toward Manila, and, on 22 November, took the church at San Pedro Makati on the eastern outskirts. They broke and fled when substantial Spanish and Filipino forces arrived. Risings now were reported in other areas, and, from 26 November to 2 December, the rebels controlled the north bank of the Pasig River.⁶⁷

On 2 December, some elements in the Parian revolted and started fires, and the Spanish began firing on it from the walls of the city. Estimating that there were 300 Spaniards capable of bearing arms against 26,000 Chinese, the Spanish took drastic action to make sure that the Chinese would never be able to assemble their forces. On 5 December, the Governor sent out orders to all outlying Spanish settlements to kill all the Chinese they could find, offering a reward for every Chinese head. Spaniards and Filipinos needed little urging. In some places, the Chinese were rounded up and decapitated ten at a time; in others, parties fanned out in the countryside to hunt them down. The total slaughter has been estimated at 17,000 to 22,000. Some fortified themselves in the mountains, but eventually were dislodged. A final army of 6,000–7,000 held out on the eastern shore of Laguna de Bay until

67 This account is based on De la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, pp. 389–92; Santamaria in Felix, *The Chinese in the Philippines*, pp. 103–05; *The Philippine Islands*, 55 vols., eds. Emma H. Blair and James A. Robertson (Cleveland, 1903–1909), Vol. 29, pp. 201–58.

they surrendered on 15 March 1640, were marched back to Manila, and lodged in a stockade north of the Pasig.

Chaunu's figures on taxes on the trade of the Chinese and on the Chinese license fees both show striking declines after 1650. Factors at work here included declining silver production in the New World and the disruption of trade by the wars of the Ming-Ch'ing transition. In this pinched setting there was a final upheaval, which might be seen as a distant echo and continuation of the farce-tragedies of the Southern Ming, such as the factional strife at Nanking and the Lung-wu Emperor's conflict with Cheng Chih-lung. On 24 April 1662, less than three months after the capitulation of the Dutch at Casteel Zeelandia on Taiwan, Cheng Ch'eng-kung sent Victorio Riccio OP, who had had a mission at Amoy in the 1650s, to bear a letter to Manila summoning the Spanish to acknowledge his suzerainty and pay him tribute, and threatening to lead his fleet to conquer them as he had the Dutch. If he had a purpose to serve beyond his megalomania, it may have been that he had his eye on the rice production of Luzon, the surplus of which would have helped to feed his hungry soldiers on the still little-cultivated plains of Taiwan. Riccio arrived on 5 May. Cheng's threat was taken very seriously. The garrisons in the Moluccas and on Mindanao were withdrawn to reinforce Manila; the loss of a Spanish presence in the Moluccas was permanent, and the Mindanao posts were not reoccupied for many years. Harsh levies of building supplies, food, and Chinese and Filipino labor were ordered, and a great deal of new work was done on the walls of the Spanish city.⁶⁸ Many argued for killing or sending away all the non-Christian Chinese. The Chinese of the Parian were more inclined to flee than to revolt, but the Spanish Governor still was trying to reassure them and keep them quiet. On 25 May, however, a confused mêlée near the Parian Gate ended with casualties on both sides and a Spanish cannonade of the Parian. More and more fled north of the Pasig. The Governor now negotiated an understanding with the Chinese that those who submitted peacefully would not be harmed, and that the non-Christians among them would leave Manila on the trading ships then present. We are not told how many left, but it is mentioned that 1,300 crammed themselves on one ship. None of this satisfied the widespread desire for slaughter. The Governor now gave way to it, ordering that any Chinese who had not come down to the assembly areas by 4 June be killed. Some were killed; others fled to the mountains, where they died of hunger or were killed by the Negritos. Father Riccio had been sent away with a defiant reply, but, by the time he returned on 8 April, 1663 with a conciliatory mes-

68 Domingo Abella, "Koxinga nearly ended Spanish rule in the Philippines in 1662," *Philippine Historical Review*, 2, No. 1 (1969), pp. 195-347, at pp. 301-2 and pp. 321-2.

sage from Cheng Ching, the Spanish were ready to once again recognize their need for good relations with the Chinese.⁶⁹

MISSIONARIES AND THE MING STATE

The Roman Catholic missionary enterprise in Ming China led to some fascinating interactions in religion, scholarship, science, literature, and art. It was intricately intertwined with the policies and institutions of the Church and of the Catholic monarchies and especially of their outposts at Manila and Macao, and on the other hand with the shifts of Ming politics and the political fortunes of its patrons and protectors in the bureaucracy. Here we are concerned only with its Chinese and foreign political connections; the cultural interactions are discussed by Willard Peterson elsewhere in this volume.⁷⁰

We have noted the effort of Dominican and Augustinian missionaries to gain entry to China in connection with the Spanish embassy of 1574–75. There were a number of later Dominican and Franciscan attempts to enter the empire from Manila, but until the 1630s, all led to immediate expulsion. During its first half-century, the effective missionary enterprise was entirely the work of members of the Society of Jesus coming to the Far East under Portuguese patronage and entering China via Macao. From Saint Francis Xavier on, Jesuits were constantly involved with Portuguese efforts to trade and settle in the Kwangtung islands. An important step forward was taken by Michele Ruggieri, SJ in his visits to Canton with the Portuguese merchants in 1580 and 1581. He studied and practised Chinese etiquette with great care, and was asked to be present at all meetings between the foreign merchants and the officials. Ruggieri also was experimenting with having expositions of Christian doctrine translated into Chinese.⁷¹ Matteo Ricci, in a number of ways, walked through doors Ruggieri had opened.

Ruggieri accompanied the Macao mission to negotiate with the governor-general at Chao-ch'ing in 1582, made an excellent impression on that high official, and was invited to stay there. In 1583 he went to Macao and brought Matteo Ricci, SJ, back with him. As hostility surfaced there, Ruggieri moved on to Shao-chou in 1589. The complex story of Ricci's gradual discovery of the possibilities of dialogue with the Chinese elite has been told many times. Ricci learned that the key to being able to move around the Empire was the

69 De la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, pp. 450, 483–84; Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 36, pp. 213–66; John E. Wills, Jr., "The Hazardous Missions of a Dominican: Victorio Riccio, O.P. in Amoy, Taiwan and Manila. Les missions aventureuses d'un Dominican, Victorio Riccio." In *Actes du IIe Colloque International de Sinologie, Chantilly, 1977* (Paris, 1980), pp. 231–57.

70 See pp. 789–840.

71 Joseph Sebes, S.J., "The Precursors of Ricci." In *East meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582–1773*, eds. Charles E. Ronan, S. J. Bonnie and B. C. Oh (Chicago, 1988), pp. 19–61.

protection of high officials in whose large entourage a single foreign priest could travel without getting into difficulties with local crowds or officials. In 1598, Ricci was able to travel to Nanking with Shih Hsing, President of the Board of War. He immediately sensed its great potential as a center for his efforts, but also great difficulties, especially when the Hideyoshi invasion of Korea had increased suspicion of all foreigners. He settled at Nanchang, where he was exposed for the first time to the sophisticated moral and philosophical debates of the late Ming academies and study societies.⁷²

In 1598, Ricci paid a brief visit to Peking in the retinue of another high official. He did not stay there, but settled in Nanking. His world map was spreading his reputation in scholarly circles. In the rich intellectual life of the city he found many to learn from and argue with: Yeh Hsiang-kao, Li Chih, Ch'en Ti, Chiao Hung. Above all, it was in these Nanking years that he met Hsü Kuang-ch'i, the most influential convert and supporter of the Jesuits in the late Ming.

In 1600, Ricci set out for Peking again, this time in the retinue of a eunuch of the Imperial Silk Manufactories. At Lin-ch'ing he came under the control of the court eunuch Ma T'ang. In Peking, he was treated as a tribute envoy and the gifts he had brought for the court as tribute presents. Since the emperor gave no audiences, it is not clear what kind of ceremony was conducted. Ricci noted the farcical condition of the "tribute system," exploited by scores of Central Asian merchants as a means of gaining access to the markets of the capital. He managed to stay on in Peking, although the Board of Ceremonies pointed out that tribute envoys were supposed to depart soon after their audiences.⁷³ He was helped by the impression his clock, spinet, and other gifts had made in the Palace, as part of the vast network of pleasures and distractions the eunuchs wove around the emperor. Chinese friends, old and new, were assisting him in putting his writings into good Chinese, writing prefaces for his works, and reprinting them in the provinces. Sometimes searching for new spiritual insight, sometimes simply curious, visitors to the capital for examinations or other official business came to see him in a steady stream. The imperial gift of a burial ground after Ricci's death in 1610 was a further indication of the solid and respected position he had established at the court.

Unlike the Catholic missions under the Ch'ing, which experienced repeated reversals of fortune as a result of changes in court power and policies, the missionaries under the Ming were little affected by central government policy, but gradually expanded their enterprise on the basis of a very Chinese network

72 The exposition in this section is based primarily on Dunne, *Generation of giants*.

73 Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, pp. 171–80.

of publishing, friendship, and patronage. By the end of the T'ien-ch'i reign, despite two episodes of anti-missionary policy, they had, in addition to the places listed above, mission outposts at Shanghai, Chia-ting, and Ch'ang-shu in Kiangsu, at Hangchow, and in Fukien, Shensi, and Shansi. Most had begun very quietly with a father living in the household of a sympathetic great man whom he had met in Nanking, Peking, or another mission.

Political opposition to the missionaries was instigated largely by Shen Ch'üeh, who became Vice-President of the Nanking Board of Ceremonies in 1615, a post that combined a minimum of actual responsibilities with a maximum of implied obligation to protect orthodoxy. In his memorial and those of his supporters, we already find allegations that the missionaries were forming a secret society like the White Lotus, were serving as spies and developing a fifth column of Chinese adherents for the aggressive purposes of the Europeans, and were enticing people with monetary rewards. Acting more in accord with his duty to defend the traditional ceremonial order, Shen condemned the use of the term *Ta-hsi-yang* (Great Western Ocean, Great Occident), which seemed to belittle China, the different calendar they used, their apparent encouragement of unfilial feeling and behavior, and their buying of property near the great Hsiao-ling tomb of T'ai-tsu.⁷⁴ In response, in 1617, an imperial edict ordered that all the missionaries should be sent back to their own countries. Shen had a good deal of power and support in Nanking, and there the missionaries were imprisoned and sent to Macao, while their converts suffered much imprisonment and mistreatment. There were signs of elite and popular anti-Christian feeling in a number of other places, but the elite protectors managed to keep the missionaries safe in their households. In Hangchow, Yang T'ing-yün even took in and sheltered a number of missionaries who had been forced to leave their posts in Peking and elsewhere.

In 1622 there was a brief revival of Shen Ch'üeh's career and his policies, which was abetted by the fiasco of the Macao cannoneers mentioned above and by the fears aroused by the large White Lotus rebellion in Shantung, but Shen soon fell from power and the missionaries once again were allowed to live in Peking. A major breakthrough came in 1629 with the appointment of Hsü Kuang-ch'i as vice-president of the Board of Ceremonies and his promotion to president of that Board in 1630. In 1629 he arranged a competitive comparison of predictions of a solar eclipse by the traditional Chinese, Muslim, and newly introduced European methods. The European method proved to be the only accurate one. Imperial approval was obtained for

74 DMB, pp. 1177–78; John D. Young, *Confucianism and Christianity: The first encounter* (Hong Kong, 1983), pp. 60–61.

reform of the calendar according to the European methods of calculation, and a team of Jesuits and Chinese scholars set to work under Hsü's direction on a large program of manufacture of instruments and translation of scientific books. The best Jesuit scientist, Johann Terrenz, died in 1630, and Johann Adam Schall von Bell and Giacomo Rho continued the work. The first calendar calculated according to the new methods was promulgated in 1634. The astronomical and calendrical work of the Jesuits turned out to be their most secure justification for keeping a presence in Peking and a connection with the court that allowed them to maintain the visibility in the capital of which Ricci already had made good use, to use their connections on behalf of other missionaries and of Macao, and even to make a few converts among the eunuchs and women of the Palace.

Under the umbrella of the Jesuits' good standing in the capital, their efforts prospered in Shansi and Shensi and extended into Hukuang, Szechwan, and Shantung. Spanish Dominicans and Franciscans entered China via the Spanish outposts at Keelung and Tamsui on the north end of Taiwan. Although they frequently were vehemently at odds with the Jesuits on mission policy, they too profited from the acceptance of the Jesuits in the capital and particularly from the reputation and political skills of Schall, and they established long-lasting mission centers in Shantung and in Fu-an, Fukien. Missionaries were more or less involved witnesses of several of the dramas of the Ming-Ch'ing transition. Two Jesuits had a harrowing ordeal as captives of the rebel Chang Hsien-chung in Szechwan. Another was summoned by the Ming Loyalist Lung-wu Emperor and sent off to Macao⁷⁵ in search of military aid. The Loyalist Yung-li Court, where the Empress and the eunuch, P'ang T'ien-shou, were converts, sent Michal Boym, SJ, to Rome as its envoy.⁷⁶ Jesuits reported on rural turmoil near Shanghai⁷⁷ and on the Ch'ing conquest of Canton.⁷⁸ Victorio Riccio, OP, left a long and fascinating record of his experiences at Amoy under Cheng Ch'eng-kung.

THE DUTCH ONSLAUGHT

The Dutch East India Company brought to Asian waters a level of centralized political and commercial decision-making and a bureaucratization of violence that went far beyond that of the Portuguese Estado da India. The Company's

75 DMB, p. 1151.

76 DMB, pp. 20–22.

77 Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, Archives of the Japan-China Province, Vol. 122, fols. 204–42, Antonio Gouvea, S. J. to Father General Vitelleschi, 16 August, 1645, at fols. 212–13.

78 Antonio Francisco Cardim, S. J., *Batalhas da Companhia de Jesus na sua Gloriosa Provincia do Japão*, ed. Luciano Cordeiro (Lisbon, 1894), pp. 37–40.

impact on some areas of Indonesia and on their Portuguese adversaries was devastating. In their relations with China, their centralized decision-making, dominated by lessons learned in Southeast Asia, made it harder for them to learn how to get along with the Chinese. That, and the way in which they brought their war with the Spanish-Portuguese monarchy to Far Eastern waters, produced a string of pointlessly violent onslaughts that left the “Red Hairs” (*hung-mao*) with a bad reputation to match that of the Fo-lang-chi. Later, they settled down to an uneasy symbiosis with the maritime Chinese in the opening up of Chinese settlement on Taiwan, a process of immense importance to the history of maritime China, but hardly noticed by most of the elite or by the Ming rulers, preoccupied with the terrible dramas of the collapse of the dynasty.

In 1601, a ship, sent by one of the precursor companies to the founding of the United Dutch East India Company, was blown past Patani on the Malay Peninsula and eventually anchored near Macao. Two parties sent ashore were taken captive by the Portuguese. Unable to send further messages ashore, the Dutch finally left the captives behind. One of the captives, according to the *Ming-shih*, was questioned by the eunuch tax commissioner Li Tao. Seventeen of the twenty were executed by the Portuguese. That such a small disturbance should be noted in the *Ming-shih* should remind us that the relatively rich Chinese documentation of European relations in the decade 1600–10 was a by-product of the elite’s preoccupation with its struggles against the eunuch mine and tax commissioners.⁷⁹

In 1604, the Company commander, Wijbrand van Waerwijck, met some Fukien merchants in Patani who told him they could arrange for the Dutch to be allowed to trade if they would give rich presents to the officials. Apparently, the merchants had the eunuch Kao Ts’ai particularly in mind. The Dutch squadron anchored in the Penghu Islands in August and messengers went back and forth. Kao Ts’ai sent word that permission to trade could be obtained for 40,000 to 50,000 reals. In October, however, the naval officer Shen Yu-jung arrived at the head of a fleet of fifty war-junks, and told the Dutch they would have to withdraw from Penghu, which was Ming territory, but that some kind of trading arrangement could be worked out if they would anchor on the coast of Taiwan.⁸⁰ The Dutch could find no suitable harbor there, and finally gave up and returned to Patani, leaving several of their

79 This section is based on W.P. Groeneveldt, *De Nederlanders in China, Eerste Deel: De Eerste Bemoeiingen om den Handel in China en de Vestiging in de Pescadores, 1601–1624* (The Hague, 1898), and Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, pp. 113–47.

80 This is obliquely confirmed by a Chinese text, Chang Wei-hua, *Ming-shih Fo-lang-chi*, p. 120, which quotes Shen saying to the Dutch, “The four seas are very wide, and there is no place where you cannot live.”

Fukienese middlemen in Chinese prisons; at least one was executed. To the scholars and civil officials, this had been just another case of collusion between eunuchs and sea-going Chinese desperadoes, that so closely paralleled the 1603 events at Manila, that the two occurrences were discussed in the same memorial.

When the Dutch tried to trade near Macao in 1607, they aroused Chinese fears that they might be in collusion with the Japanese, and they were finally driven off by the Portuguese. Thereafter, the Dutch preoccupied themselves with consolidating their positions in the Spice Islands and on Java, and had to get along with the supplies of Chinese goods which Chinese ships brought to Southeast Asian ports. Their attacks on Chinese shipping to Manila that occurred from 1619 to 1621, which attacks were part of their world war on the Iberian monarchy, must have left a few more “Red Hair” horror stories circulating in Fukien ports, but left no trace in surviving Chinese sources.

The Dutch returned to the offensive on the China coast in 1622 with the unsuccessful attack on Macao previously described. Their fleet then went on to occupy the Penghu Islands in July. There they began to build a fort. They also sent a messenger to Amoy with their amazing demands: Chinese merchants must be allowed to come to Penghu or Taiwan to trade. Chinese merchants also would be given Dutch passes for voyages to Batavia and perhaps also to Siam and Cambodia, but not to Manila. Any Chinese vessel sailing to Manila would be subject to capture and confiscation by the Dutch. Any delay in agreeing to these proposals would lead to attacks on Chinese shipping and coastal towns. The Dutch officers on the immediate scene soon came to understand that they could not bully the Ming Empire as they had often bullied some small Southeast Asian port kingdom, but the Dutch authorities in Batavia learned slowly, or not at all, and over and over again, their orders licensed episodes of irrational violence against those with whom they would have to cooperate to obtain trade.⁸¹

On 29 September 1622, the Dutch on Penghu received a letter from Shang Chou-tso, governor of Fukien. It said nothing, as far as the Dutch could tell, about permission to trade. When the Dutch began to talk about attacking the coast, the bearers of Shang's letter suggested that something could be worked out if the Dutch would withdraw to some port on the coast of Taiwan. The Dutch rejected this, the solution already offered them in 1604 which they eventually would be forced to accept, and, in October and November, they plundered towns and burned junks in the area around Amoy. Chinese captives were put to work on the fort in Penghu, and some

81 On the Penghu episode see also Leonard Blussé, “The Dutch occupation of the Pescadores (1622–1624)”, *Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan*, 18 (1973), pp. 28–44.

of the survivors later were shipped off to Batavia. Even so, Shang wrote to renew the suggestion that his envoys had made informally: something could be worked out, but not as long as the Dutch were occupying Penghu. Early in 1623, the Dutch commander Cornelis Reijersen visited Shang in Foochow, and they quickly came to an understanding. In the presence of a representative of the Fukien authorities, the Dutch would make a token beginning in the demolition of their fort on Penghu, which then would be reported to Peking with a recommendation that Chinese merchants be given passes to trade with the Dutch at a port on Taiwan. The Dutch might stay in Penghu until they found a suitable port on Taiwan, but no longer. Chinese envoys would be sent to Batavia to secure confirmation of this agreement.

In June 1623, however, Reijersen and Shang learned that their superiors in Batavia and Peking had both rejected the proposed agreement. Shang was dismissed from his office. The Dutch sent ships to cruise off Kwangtung and Fukien to capture Chinese shipping bound for Manila. Later instructions from Batavia, received in August, were somewhat more conciliatory, and Reijersen made further probes for renewed negotiations in August and in October, but on the latter occasion, some of the Dutch envoys were imprisoned and their ships were attacked by fire-ships. In January 1624, Dutch ships again raided along the coast south of Amoy. Beginning in February, 1624, a force of forty to fifty war junks carrying over 5,000 men gradually assembled in the northern part of the Penghu Islands. On 30 July, this force advanced to occupy all of the main island except the point where the Dutch fort stood. The Dutch, now cut off from their drinking water, had to negotiate in earnest. Li Tan, headman of the Chinese community in Hirado, Japan, and his young agent, Cheng Chih-lung, were very actively involved as intermediaries.⁸² By the end of 1624, the Dutch had completed their withdrawal from Penghu and were beginning to establish themselves in the area of modern Tainan. After much loss of life and property on both sides, they had accepted the solution that first had been offered them in 1604.

THE DUTCH AND THE SPANISH ON TAIWAN

In 1620, Taiwan was inhabited almost entirely by the various Malayo-Polynesian peoples whom we call the “aborigines”: some of them quite closely related to some of the peoples of Luzon a hundred miles to the south. They lived comfortably off the abundant fish and game and the modest harvests of their shifting cultivation. Chinese pirates occasionally based themselves

82 Iwao Seiichi, “Li Tan, Chief of the Chinese residents at Hirado, Japan in the last days of the Ming dynasty,” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, Vol. 17 (1958), pp. 27–83.

on the coast, and Chinese and Japanese traders met regularly in some of the harbors. The Dutch were intruders and competitors, but might turn out to be tolerable, or even welcome neighbors, if they provided new and stable trade links among China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and even the distant markets of Europe. But, should they be so unperceptive as to try to have everything their own way with no consideration for the interests of their Chinese and Japanese trading partners, they would make themselves most unwelcome. Unfortunately, they were that obtuse. In 1627 and 1628, their efforts to collect tolls from the Japanese who had been trading at Taiwan before the Dutch arrived led to a dangerous quarrel and the Japanese authorities retaliated by prohibiting Dutch trade with Japan until 1632.⁸³

The Dutch difficulties with their Chinese trading partners down to 1636 resulted from their repeated overreactions to any Chinese trading practice that they suspected interfered with their “free trade” with all Chinese merchants and from the existence of a great deal of conflict among the would-be Chinese sea-lords. In particular, the Dutch repeatedly made plans to assist the Ming authorities against one “pirate” or another, their help to be rewarded by “free trade.” This led to much Dutch naval activity on the coast, which usually was, on balance, unwelcome to the authorities and to coastal residents, especially after the brutal Dutch raids of 1622–23. The only stable solution was for the Dutch to stay away from the coast, stay out of coastal politics, and make the best they could of whatever trade came to them. Those had been, after all, the terms of the original understanding of 1624.

Between 1628 and 1636 Cheng Chih-lung maneuvered and fought his way among old enemies and among past and present allies to a dominant position on the Fukien coast. The Dutch usually supported him against his enemies, but always were disappointed by the trade they got in return. Cheng simply was not yet in complete enough control of the situation to give them what they wanted. In 1633, a bellicose Dutch commander delivered an ultimatum to Cheng demanding relaxation of restrictions on trade, sailed off to Batavia without waiting for his reply, which was conciliatory, and returned in July to attack the fleet of the astonished Cheng. After two months of small actions and Dutch marauding along the coast, Cheng finally assembled his fleet for

83 For the first part of the Dutch period on Taiwan the most important source and guide to the literature is *De Dagregisters van het Kasteel Zeelandia, Taiwan, 1629–1662. Deel I: 1629–1641* eds. J. L. Blussé et al. (The Hague, 1986). Useful studies include Ts’ao Yung-ho, *Tai-wan tsao-ch’i li-shih yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1979); John R. Shepherd, *Statecraft and political economy on the Taiwan frontier, 1600–1800* (Stanford, 1993), chs. 2, 3; and Wen-hsiung Hsu, “From aboriginal island to Chinese frontier: The development of Taiwan before 1683.” In *China’s island frontier studies in the historical geography of Taiwan*, ed. Ronald G. Knapp (Honolulu, 1980), pp. 3–29. Specific citations for some assertions can be found in John E. Wills, Jr., “The Dutch Period in Taiwan History: A preliminary survey,” unpublished.

a full-scale attack on a Dutch squadron off Quemoy on 21 October. One Dutch ship was blown up and the rest retreated to Taiwan. The Dutch had been trying to cooperate with Cheng's rivals, especially one Liu Hsiang, but now rejected new overtures from him. He, then, attacked the Dutch fort on Taiwan in April 1634, but was beaten off.⁸⁴

A less dangerous challenge to the Dutch position on Taiwan came from the Spanish settlements on the north end of the island. The outpost at Keelung had been established in 1626 as a strategic move against Dutch power and as an effort to provide a center where Chinese merchants might come to trade with the Spanish without Dutch interference.

Another post was founded at Tamsui in 1629. The Spanish built a very solid stone fortress at Keelung and fairly substantial fortifications at Tamsui, and, in 1628, were reported to have 200 Spanish and 400 Filipino soldiers at Keelung, probably more than the Dutch could have mustered in the south. The Chinese did come to Keelung to trade, but, in 1630, they found that the Spanish had very little cash on hand with which to buy their silk. In 1633 the Spanish were able to buy as much silk as the Dutch had in some of their first years in Taiwan, but they were finding Keelung so unhealthy that about 100 Spanish and twenty Portuguese left for Manila later that year. Tamsui faced a good deal of aborigine hostility, and was abandoned in 1638. In August 1642, a force of 591 Dutchmen took the Keelung fortress, encountering little resistance from a decrepit garrison of 115 Spaniards and 155 Filipinos.

By 1636 Cheng Chih-lung had no really dangerous rival for naval supremacy on the Fukien coast, the Japanese conflict was settled, and the Company had sent over 400 fresh soldiers to Taiwan who, in a series of marches to the north and south in 1635–36, established firm Dutch domination over many more aborigine villages and vastly increased the zone that was safe for Chinese agriculture and commerce. A formidable stone fortress, Casteel Zeelandia, near modern Tainan, was completed and dedicated in 1639. Welcome reductions in competition for China–Japan trade resulted from the Japanese exclusion of the Portuguese and prohibition of all Japanese ocean voyages. Trade expanded very rapidly: in nineteen months, from late 1637 to early 1639, the Dutch received Chinese goods worth well over 1,000,000 taels.⁸⁵ A large part of these goods were paid for in Japanese silver. The volume of trade remained in this range until production and trade in China were disrupted by the Ming–Ch'ing wars.

84 Leonard Blussé, "The VOC as sorcerer's apprentice: Stereotypes and social engineering on the China coast." In *Leyden Studies in Sinology*, ed. W. L. Idema (Leiden, 1981), pp. 87–105.

85 Blussé, et al., *Dagregisters*, p. 451.

The growth of Chinese settlement and agriculture on Taiwan was a slower process. Chinese traders had been in the coastal aborigine villages when the Dutch arrived. Particularly welcome to the Dutch was the growing supply of deer hides, hunted or trapped by frontier Chinese or bought from the aborigines, which the Company bought for the Japanese market.⁸⁶ A very different mode of Chinese settlement emerged as rice and sugar cultivation expanded in the plains near the Dutch forts. Several big Chinese merchants did a great deal of investing and organizing. The most interesting figure among them was Su Ming-kang, the first chief of the Chinese community at Batavia, who resigned that position and moved to Taiwan in 1635. After 1644 a wave of refugees from the Ming-Ch'ing wars came across the Taiwan Strait. Some of them returned to the mainland as the fighting in the southeast began to die down, but there was another surge in the 1650s as Cheng Ch'eng-kung consolidated his power base on the Fukien coast and the Ch'ing increased their efforts to drive him out. The Chinese population was less than 4,000 in 1640, and over 14,000 in 1648.

In striking parallel to the Spanish at Manila, the Dutch levied a head tax on every Chinese. Beginning in 1645, monopolies of trade with various aborigine villages were distributed to local Chinese under a competitive bidding system that produced considerable revenue for the Company and much trouble for everyone in the 1650s. Around 1650, the Company's income from Taiwan came about one half from profits of trade and one half from tolls, head taxes, and so on. As the payments for the various monopolies rose as a result of competitive bidding, the tax collectors were more often in arrears or in debt. The violent practices of head-tax collectors, and especially their intrusions into households where the women were kept secluded, were bitterly resented.

In September 1652, all these tensions exploded in a large but poorly armed rebellion led by Kuo Huai-i. The Dutch, warned by seven of the headmen of the Chinese community, had only one night to muster their forces. The next morning Kuo's forces, over 4,000 strong, plundered the Dutch settlement at Saccam (Ch'ih-k'an), across the harbor from Casteel Zeelandia, and killed and mutilated eight Dutchmen and some slaves. But then, they broke and fled before the discipline and firepower of only 150 Dutch musketeers and never again offered coherent resistance. The Dutch and aborigines hunted out the fugitives, including one large group that was camped in the mountains, and "killed between 3,000 and 4,000 rebel Chinese in revenge for the

86 Thomas O. Höllman, "Formosa and the trade in venison and deer skins." In *Emporia, commodities, and entrepreneurs in Asian maritime trade, c. 1400-1750*, Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung, Südasiens-Institut, Universität Heidelberg, No. 141, eds. Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund (Stuttgart, 1991) pp. 263-90.

spilled Dutch Christian blood.” There are striking parallels here with the rebellions at Manila: the split between the rural population and the leaders who informed the Dutch, the resentment of tax collection practices, and the enthusiastic participation of indigenous troops in the slaughter.⁸⁷

In the 1650s, the profits of the Dutch Company from Taiwan became smaller and less consistent, largely as a result of Cheng Ch’eng-kung’s efforts to establish tight control over trade and shipping in the Taiwan Strait. Overproduction in the growing sugar industry was aggravated by a decline in European demand for Taiwan sugar as production revived in Brazil. The Company authorities in Batavia were more and more inclined to view Taiwan as a dubious asset, and thus less inclined to take serious measures to deal with the possibility of an invasion by Cheng Ch’eng-kung. Nothing they could have done, however, would have enabled them to withstand the large and well-disciplined army with which Cheng finally landed on Taiwan on 30 April 1661.

When Cheng’s troops landed, Dutch rule in most of Taiwan ended in a few days. In view of the many conflicts and irritations previously described, it is not surprising that most of the Taiwan Chinese seem to have welcomed Cheng as a liberator. The defenders of Casteel Zeelandia could do nothing but fend off Cheng’s attacks, receive some reinforcements from Batavia, and wait as Cheng Ch’eng-kung consolidated his control of the island, put many of his soldiers to work farming, and even collected from the Taiwan Chinese the debts they owed the Dutch. On 1 February 1662, the Dutch capitulated and were allowed to march out in good order and depart, leaving to Cheng the Company’s stores of money, arms, and trade goods. The Dutch presence on Taiwan had stimulated and accelerated the process of Chinese settlement there, but the Dutch had long ago outstayed their welcome. Taiwan had a Chinese ruler for the first time.

THE WORLD OF THE MARITIME CHINESE

The structure of this chapter seems to require dealing with its subject matter via a set of topics about relations between the various European nations or peoples and such vast and undifferentiated entities as the Chinese state or the Chinese people. Most of these relations took place, however, in a very special set of environments dominated by a very distinctive variant of Chinese cul-

87 Johannes Huber, “Chinese settlers against the Netherlands East India Company: The rebellion led by Kuo Huai-i on Taiwan in 1652.” In *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th centuries*, Sinica Leidensia, Vol. 22, ed. E. B. Vermeer (Leiden, 1990), pp. 265–96.

ture, economy, and politics: that of the maritime Chinese.⁸⁸ We have seen more of the maritime Chinese in their settlement centers away from China, such as Manila and Taiwan, than on the China coast itself. In addition to the famous Cheng family, we have encountered some named individuals, like Su Ming-kang and Kuo Huai-i on Taiwan, and the hapless Juan Bautista de la Vera in Manila. The fate of the latter is an excellent example of the hazards of the mediation across cultural and linguistic barriers that was a maritime Chinese specialty. We have also seen that many maritime Chinese took on sometimes more, sometimes less, of the clothing, customs, and religion of the Europeans under whom they settled.

The first Portuguese ventures east of India, we have seen, owed something to the Chinese who already were trading at Melaka when they arrived and who aided their efforts to go on to Siam and the China coast. In the 1540s and 1550s, the Portuguese shared a maritime world in crisis with a host of Chinese leaders who raided, traded, and negotiated with the government as opportunities shifted; our sources hardly ever allow us to identify a specific interaction. In 1600–05, offshore intriguers and entrepreneurs brought the Dutch to the Fukien coast for the first time and brought agents of the Ming state to Manila. And of course the Cheng family dominated Dutch relations with China as it dominated much of maritime China after 1625.

The achievements of the maritime Chinese away from the south China coast can be traced, frequently through the records of the Dutch or other Europeans, in many other ports of East and Southeast Asia: Nagasaki, Batavia, Banten, Ayudhya, Melaka, Makasar, and so on. Of these the most important for our story, the best studied, and perhaps the best documented, is Batavia. There had been a small Chinese settlement at Jakarta before the Dutch conquered it in 1619. Immediately after the Dutch victory, the formidable Governor-General, Jan Pietersz Coen, appointed Su Ming-kang, “Captain Bencon” to the Dutch, as headman of the Chinese community. Su and another highly capable leader whom the Dutch called Jan Con and whose Chinese name we do not know almost immediately began contracting with the Dutch to collect taxes on various forms of trading and activity, of which the tax on Chinese gambling was one of the earliest and most lucrative. Jan Con also began supplying lumber and stone for the new buildings and fortifications, hard work made more dangerous by attacks by the Banten-based enemies of the Dutch, and contracting with the Dutch to supply Chinese labor for the buildings, walls, and canals. There thus was a remarkable congruence

88 John E. Wills, Jr., “Maritime China from Wang Chih to Shih Lang: Themes in Peripheral History.” In *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, region, and continuity in seventeenth-century China*, eds. Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, Jr. (New Haven, 1979), pp. 204–38.

of interest among the leaders of the Chinese community, profiting from labor contracting, supply of building materials, and tax farming, and the substantial numbers of poor Chinese who were getting steady work on the building projects. In 1625, at Jan Con's suggestion, the Dutch began to levy a special tax of 3 reals on each Chinese, the proceeds of which were earmarked for construction projects and thus came back to the Chinese as wages, labor contracting profits, and payments for supplies of building materials. In addition the Chinese paid a capitation tax to obtain exemption from service in the local militia, which was farmed by the Chinese headmen. These two taxes came to provide over half the revenue from tolls and taxes at Batavia. By 1644, the Chinese headmen farmed nineteen of the twenty-four tolls, levies, and monopolies instituted by the Dutch at Batavia.

By the deaths of Jan Con in 1639 and Su Ming-kang in 1644, the Chinese community at Batavia was so prosperous that it no longer provided much of the heavy labor at Batavia. They maintained a complex network of trade with many ports, including quite a few where the Dutch were not allowed or could not afford to maintain a presence. They were making first efforts in salt production and sugar cultivation around Batavia which would lead to large-scale production later in the century. In the tense and intricate diplomacy of the Dutch with their Javanese enemies of Banten and Mataram, Chinese advisors on both sides frequently served as intermediaries. Batavia, like Manila and Casteel Zeelandia on Taiwan, was in many ways very much a "Chinese colonial town."⁸⁹

The energetic meetings of two worlds described in this chapter, the evolution of such complex Sino-European accommodations as Macao, Manila, and the early network of missionaries and converts, owed a great deal to maritime Chinese both on the China coast and in foreign ports, to astute and realistic officials, and to statesmen and intellectuals who were much more open to novelty and to interaction with foreigners than some clichés about Chinese culture would have us believe. In our increasingly interactive and transnational world, the study of the achievements and frustrations of these Chinese and of the amazing variety of brutal, devoted, astute, obtuse, brave Europeans with whom they interacted can provide rich food for thought.

89 Blussé, *Strange Company*, chs. 4, 5, 6.

CHAPTER 8

MING CHINA AND THE EMERGING WORLD ECONOMY, c. 1470–1650

INTRODUCTION

During the Sung (AD 960–1279) and early Yüan (1279–c. 1320) dynasties, China's agricultural and industrial production, its domestic commerce, and its economic contacts with the "outside world" all expanded dramatically, reaching levels that far surpassed anything known in earlier periods of Chinese history. In recent years, William H. McNeill, Janet L. Abu-Lughod, and F.W. Mote have been among those who have argued that these developments not only had a profound effect on Chinese civilization, but on that of much of the rest of Eurasia. As Professor McNeill has put it,

New wealth arising among a hundred million Chinese began to flow out across the seas [and significantly along caravan routes as well] and added new vigor and scope to market-related activity. Scores, hundreds, and perhaps thousands of vessels began to sail from port to port within the Sea of Japan and the South China Sea, the Indonesian Archipelago and the Indian Ocean. Most voyages were probably relatively short, and goods were reassorted at many different entrepôts along the way from original producer to ultimate consumer . . . [A]n increasing flow of commodities meant a great number of persons moving to and fro on shipboard or sitting in bazaars, chaffering over prices.¹

By the time Marco Polo began his seventeen-year stay in China during the mid-1270s, this "increasing flow of commodities" meant that substantial quantities of Chinese raw silk, silk textiles, porcelains, and other goods were being carried by ship and caravan to other parts of Asia, to East Africa, and the Middle East, to the Mediterranean trading area, and even to the major

¹ William H. McNeill, *The pursuit of power* (Chicago, 1982), p. 53. See also Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European hegemony: The world system AD 1250–1350* (New York and Oxford, 1988), pp. 316–40; and F. W. Mote, "China in the Age of Columbus." In *Circa 1492: Art in the age of exploration*, ed. Jay A. Levenson (Washington, DC, New Haven, and London, 1991), pp. 337–50. Important new work on China's maritime trade during the late imperial period can be found in *Chung-kuo Hai-yang fa-chan shih lun-wen-chi*, 4 vols., ed. Chung-kuo Hai-yang fa-chan shih lun-wen chi pien-chi wei-yüan hui (Taipei, 1984, 1986, 1988, and 1991).

markets of northwestern Europe.² However, following this promising and, for some at least, very lucrative beginning, commercial contacts between “East and West” were sharply reduced during what Robert S. Lopez and Harry A. Miskimin have called “The economic depression of the renaissance:” the protracted series of economic and monetary contractions that affected virtually all of Eurasia at one time or another between the early fourteenth and late fifteenth centuries.³ Still, memories of the great profits that once had been made in this trade helped to stimulate many of the important European “Voyages of Discovery” during the later Renaissance. When Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain in August 1492, for example, he was not intending to discover a “New World,” but rather a shorter, faster, and thus less expensive route to East Asia and the Spice Islands. Indeed, as Columbus himself apparently wrote on 21 October 1492, nine days after arriving in the New World for the first time,

. . . I shall set sail for another great island which I strongly believe should be Japan, according to the signs made by the San Salvador Indians with me. They call that island Colba [Cuba], where they say there are many great ships and navigators. And from that island I intend to go to another that they call Bohio [Hispaniola] . . . As to any others that lie in between, I shall see them in passing, and according to what gold or spices I find, I will determine what I must do. But I have already decided to go to the [Chinese] mainland and to the city of Quisay [Hangchow in modern Chekiang Province], and give your Highnesses’ letters to the Great Khan and ask for a reply and return with it.⁴

Like many of his European contemporaries, Columbus had read and even annotated the glowing descriptions of Asia and Asian trade that could be found in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century travel accounts of Marco Polo, “Sir John Mandeville,” and others. Moreover, he may have been

2 Robert Sabatino Lopez, “China silk in Europe in the Yüan Period,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 72 (1952), pp. 72–76; Robert Lopez, Harry Miskimin, and Abraham Udovitch, “England to Egypt, 1350–1500: Long-term trends and long-distance trade,” In *Studies in the economic history of the Middle East from the rise of Islam to the present day*, ed. M. A. Cooke (London, 1970), pp. 93–128; Harry A. Miskimin, *The economy of early Renaissance Europe, 1300–1450* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 126–29; and Eliyahu Ashtor, *Studies on the Levantine trade in the Middle Ages* (London, 1978), Vol. 4, pp. 45–56.

3 Robert S. Lopez and Harry A. Miskimin, “The economic depression of the Renaissance,” *The Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser., 14 (1962), pp. 408–26. This article can also be found in Miskimin’s *Cash, credit and crisis in Europe* (London, 1989). See also M. M. Postan, “The Trade of Medieval Europe: the North,” In *Trade and industry in the Middle Ages*, Vol. 2 of *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, 2nd ed., eds. M. M. Postan and Edward Miller (Cambridge, England, 1987), pp. 240–305. For an important recent discussion of this “depression” which nevertheless seriously overstates the extent to which the Ming economy “collapsed” during the mid-fifteenth century, see Abu-Lughod, *Before European hegemony*, pp. 340–64.

4 Robert H. Fuson, trans., *The log of Christopher Columbus* (Camden, Maine, 1987), p. 90. See also Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the ocean sea: A life of Christopher Columbus* (Boston, 1992), pp. 250–66; Martin Colclutt, “Circa 1492 in Japan: Columbus and the legend of golden Cipangu,” In *Circa 1492*, ed. Levenson, pp. 305–14; and *The four voyages of Christopher Columbus*, ed. J. M. Cohen (London, 1988), pp. 70–76.

further encouraged by letters and a world map he is said to have received in the 1470s or 1480s from one of Europe's greatest scholars, the Florentine cosmographer, Paolo del Pozzo Toscanelli. Drawing heavily on Marco Polo's *Travels* himself, Toscanelli wrote enthusiastically about the wealth and commercial potential of Asia in general and of China in particular:

. . . the number of navigators [there] with merchandise is so great that in all the rest of the world there are not so many as in one most noble port called Zaitun [Ch'üan-chou in modern Fukien Province] . . . [The south of China] is very populous and very rich, with a multitude of provinces and kingdoms, and with cities without number, under one prince who is called Great [Khan] . . . [China] is worth seeking by the Latins, not only because great wealth may be obtained from it, gold and silver, all sorts of gems, and spices, which never reach us; but also on account of its learned men, philosophers, and expert astrologers . . . ⁵

As both Columbus' and Toscanelli's references here to the "Great Khan" of the Mongols indicate, much of the information on East Asia that was available to educated Europeans during the late fifteenth century was seriously out of date.⁶ It was not entirely inaccurate, however. Although China, like much of the rest of Eurasia, had experienced severe economic and political difficulties during the mid-fifteenth century,⁷ by the time Columbus made his first Atlantic crossing in 1492 both the Chinese economy and the ruling Ming dynasty (1368–1644) were making impressive recoveries from their earlier troubles. Indeed, during the late fifteenth century China was still the greatest economic power on earth. It had a population probably in excess of 100 million, a prodigiously productive agricultural sector, a vast and sophisticated domestic trading network, and handicraft industries superior in just about every way to anything known in other parts of Eurasia. Following a visit to the great Central Asian political and commercial center of Samarkand early in the fifteenth century, for example, a European diplomat described the Chinese goods he found there as "the richest and most precious of all those

5 Paolo Toscanelli, "Toscanelli's Letter to Columbus, 1474," included in Dan O'Sullivan, *The age of discovery, 1400–1550* (London and New York, 1984), pp. 97–98. See also Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Columbus* (Oxford and New York, 1991), pp. 24–44; Zvi Dor-Ner, *Columbus and the age of discovery* (New York, 1991), pp. 76–79; David Woodward, "Maps and the rationalization of geographic space." In *Circa 1492*, ed. Levenson, pp. 83–87; and David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford and New York, 1986), p. 198.

6 The term "Great Khan" refers to the Mongol rulers of China, the last of whom had been driven from the country by Ming armies a century before Toscanelli's letter. On the expulsion of the Mongols from China, see Edward L. Dreyer, "Military origins of Ming China." In *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 88–106.

7 For details on these mid-century problems in China, see Denis Twitchett and Tilemann Grimm, "The Cheng-t'ung, Ching-t'ai, and T'ien-shun Reigns, 1436–1464." In *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 305–42.

[imported into the city] . . . , for the craftsmen of Cathay are reputed to be the most skilful by far beyond those of any other nation.”⁸

As had been true during the great expansion of Eurasian trade between the tenth and fourteenth centuries, among the Chinese goods most highly prized in European, Middle Eastern, and Asian markets during the “Age of Columbus” were raw silk, silk textiles, and the magnificent (and sometimes not so magnificent) porcelains manufactured at industrial centers such as Ching-te-chen in Kiangsi province and Te-hua in Fukien province.⁹ Two great collections of this porcelain remain in the Middle East today, one in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi in Istanbul and the other, from the Ardebil Shrine, which is now housed in the Archaeological Museum in Tehran.¹⁰ Substantial quantities of Ming porcelain also have been found in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, India, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and East Africa.¹¹ One scholar who worked in East Africa during the 1960s reported being constantly surprised by the large amounts of “blue-and-white” porcelain from the Yüan and Ming dynasties that could be found “on any urban site on the Kenya coast.”¹² Similar remarks have been made about some of the old trading ports in western

8 Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, *Clavijo: Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403–1406*, tr. Guy Le Strange (London, 1928), pp. 288–89. For further information on the caravan trade linking China to other parts of Asia during the Ming period, see the chapter by Morris Rossabi elsewhere in this volume. See also Rossabi’s “The ‘Decline’ of the Central Asian Caravan Trade.” In *The rise of merchant empires: long-distance trade in the early modern world*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 351–70.

9 For details on Chinese handicraft production during the Ming period, see the chapter by Martin Heidjra elsewhere in this volume.

10 John Alexander Pope, *Fourteenth-century blue-and-white: a group of Chinese porcelains in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul* (Washington, DC, 1952); and his *Chinese porcelain from the Ardebil Shrine* (Washington, DC, 1956). Despite the loss of “a large quantity of porcelain” in an Ottoman palace fire in 1574, more than 8,000 pieces of Chinese porcelain remain in the Topkapı collection in Istanbul today. Many of those date from the Ming period. The collection in Tehran contains more than 1,000 pieces, none of which dates from later than 1612. See Jean McClure Mudge, *Chinese export porcelain in North America* (New York, 1986), p. 18.

11 On Ming porcelain in Southeast Asia, see John S. Guy, *Oriental trade ceramics in South-East Asia, ninth to sixteenth centuries* (Singapore, 1986). On Sri Lanka and India, see Basil Gray, “The Export of Chinese Porcelain to India,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, 36 (1964–66) pp. 21–36; John Carswell, “China and Islam: A survey of the coast of India and Ceylon,” *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, 42 (1977–78), pp. 25–45; and Frank Perlin, “Financial institutions and business practices across the Euro-Asian interface: comparative and structural considerations, 1500–1900.” In *The European discovery of the world and its economic effects on pre-industrial society, 1500–1800*, ed. Hans Pohl (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 264–65; on Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, see George T. Scanlon, “Egypt and China: Trade and imitation.” In *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, ed. D. S. Richards (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 90–91, and 95, n. 24; and John Carswell, “Blue-and-white in China, Asia, and the Islamic world.” in *Blue and white: Chinese porcelain and its impact on the Western World*, ed. John Carswell (Chicago, 1985), pp. 30–34; on East Africa, see Neville Chittick, *Kilwa: An Islamic trading center on the East African coast* (Nairobi, 1974), Vol. 1, pp. 240–41, 244; and James S. Kirkman, “The coast of Kenya as a factor in the trade and culture of the Indian Ocean.” In *Sociétés et Compagnies de Commerce en Orient et dans l’Océan Indien*, ed. Michel Mollat (Paris, 1970), pp. 247–53.

12 Kirkman, “The Coast of Kenya,” p. 248.

India, certain areas of which are said to be “littered with the sherds of late Ming [porcelain].”¹³

Following the gift of a small quantity of Ming blue-and-white wares from the Sultan of Egypt to Doge Pasquale Malpiero of Venice in 1461,¹⁴ European leaders began to collect Chinese porcelain in earnest as well. Lorenzo de’ Medici acquired his first pieces in 1487 and, when Vasco da Gama left Portugal for India in 1498, he was given specific instructions by King Manuel I to find spices, Christians, and “porcellanas.” Da Gama did bring some porcelain back to Lisbon in 1499, as did Pedro Alvares Cabral when he returned with the second Portuguese expedition to India in 1501. As the Portuguese moved further east over the next two decades, they found Chinese goods so plentiful¹⁵ that king Manuel soon began a regular practice of presenting Ming blue-and-white as gifts to the royal families of Europe.¹⁶ Such porcelain did not remain a royal monopoly for long, however. Albrecht Dürer received his first pieces from a Portuguese acquaintance in 1520 and, by the 1530s, Ming blue-and-white wares were apparently readily available on both the Antwerp and Lisbon markets.¹⁷

Obtaining Chinese silks and porcelains, and particularly those of quality, was not always as easy as it may have appeared during the first half of the sixteenth century, however. For example, in the early seventeenth century, one frustrated Dutch merchant remarked that he and his colleagues had “not failed to find goods [in China] . . . but we have failed to produce the money to pay for them.”¹⁸ Since the Dutch were already importing large quantities of Chinese silk and porcelain into Amsterdam at this time,¹⁹ this statement is somewhat misleading. Nevertheless, it is true that Chinese traders at this time were often disdainful of foreign manufactured goods and preferred to be paid, as the above statement suggests, in “money.” In fact, what the Chinese really wanted from most foreign merchants during the late six-

13 Perlin, “Financial Institutions and Business Practices,” p. 265.

14 John Esten, ed., *Blue and white China: Origins/Western influences* (Boston and Toronto, 1987), p. 1.

15 During a trip to Melaka in 1515, Andrew Corsalis was impressed to find Chinese porcelains as well as “silk and wrought stuffs of all kinds, such as damasks, satins, and brocades of extraordinary richness.” Corsalis is quoted in G. F. Hudson, *Europe and China* (London, 1931), p. 203.

16 Ilda Arez, Maria Azevedo Coutinho Vasconcellos e Souza, and Jessie McNab, *Portugal and porcelains* (Lisbon, 1984), pp. 14–16.

17 D. F. Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Chinese export porcelain* (New York, Toronto, and London, 1974), p. 46. See also Jean Michel Massing, “The quest for the exotic: Albrecht Dürer in the Netherlands.” In *Circa 1492: Art in the age of exploration*, ed. J. A. Levenson (Washington, D.C., 1991), pp. 115–19. On the commercial connections between Portugal and Antwerp in the early sixteenth century, see Fernand Braudel, *The perspective of the world*, tr. Siân Reynolds (New York, 1984), pp. 137–57.

18 Cited in Fernand Braudel, *The wheels of commerce*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York, 1983), p. 221. See also the comments by Antonio de Morga in his *The Philippine Islands, Moluccas, Siam, Cambodia, Japan, and China at the close of the sixteenth century*, trans. Henry E. J. Stanley (London, 1868), p. 340.

19 C. L. van der Pijl-Ketel, ed., *The ceramic load of the Witte Leeuw (1613)* (Amsterdam, 1982), pp. 8–10.

teenth and early seventeenth centuries was silver. To understand the reasons for this, and to understand the role played by international bullion flows in the expansion of China's maritime trade during the early-modern period (c. 1470–1800), it is necessary to review some of the special circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Ming monetary system in the late fourteenth century.²⁰

SILVER AND THE MING MONETARY SYSTEM

One of the most important developments affecting the Ming monetary system occurred nearly two decades before the dynasty was founded in 1368. In the face of mounting economic troubles in many parts of China during the 1340s,²¹ some of which may have been related to deteriorating economic and political conditions elsewhere in Eurasia,²² in 1350 the Mongol-controlled Yüan dynasty (1279–1368) announced a major new currency reform in which a new variety of government-issued paper money was to be printed and distributed. Because the Yüan treasuries lacked sufficient reserves at this time, however, these new notes were neither convertible nor backed with precious metals, copper coins, or silk cloth as some earlier Mongol notes had been. Given this fact, and given the natural disasters, military uprisings, and outbreaks of epidemic disease that were then plaguing many parts of China, it is not surprising that these new notes failed to hold their arbitrarily assigned value. Indeed, by the mid-1350s they had become virtually worthless, thus encouraging the hoarding of both good quality copper coins and unminted gold and silver. As will be seen below, silver rose especially rapidly in value at this time. Over the next few years, credit in China became increasingly difficult to obtain, commercial activity slowed, and the Yüan dynasty fell in the late 1360s amidst a sharp monetary contraction in everything except poor

20 For a more detailed discussion of the Ming monetary system, see the chapter by Martin Heijdra in this volume.

21 On these troubles, see Frederick W. Mote, "The rise of the Ming dynasty, 1330–1367." In *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 18–47.

22 Among the many difficulties that arose in the Eurasian economy at this time were a series of sharp monetary fluctuations that adversely affected commercial activity in western Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia during the 1340s. Although the underlying causes of these fluctuations are not yet understood, Carlo Cipolla has suggested that at least some of them were probably related to the outbreak of the so-called "Black Death" somewhere in Central Asia in the years immediately prior to 1346. The Black Death not only disrupted international trade in Eurasia at this time, but may have seriously affected bullion mining in Turkestan, Ferghana, and Bukhara as well. On the monetary difficulties in mid-fourteenth-century Europe, and particularly on the difficulties in Florence, a city which had especially close commercial ties with Asia, see Carlo Cipolla, *The monetary policy of fourteenth-century Florence* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1982), pp. 1–46. For similar problems in mid-fourteenth-century South Asia, see *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 1, ed. Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 93–101.

TABLE 8.1

Exchange rates between Ming paper currency and silver, 1376–1567 (value of one i-kuan note in liang of silver)*

Year	Official rate (<i>liang</i>)	Market rate (<i>liang</i>)
1376	1.00	1.00
1386	0.20	
1391	0.20	
1397	0.07153	
1407	0.0125	
1413	0.0476	
1426	0.0025	
1429	0.01	
1432	0.01	
1436		0.0009
1452	0.002	
1456	0.00142	
1477	0.005	0.00045
1480	0.005	
1487	0.025	
1493	0.003	
1511	0.00143	
1525	0.03	
1527	0.001143	
1528	0.009	
1529	0.003	0.0008
1540	0.00032	0.0001
1566	0.0002	
1567	0.0006	

*One *liang* equals approximately 0.0375 kilograms by weight.

Source: P'eng Hsin-wei, *Chung-kuo huo-pi shih*, rev. ed. (Shanghai, 1965), pp. 671–72.

quality copper²³ coins and government issued paper notes that no one wanted and very few people in China would use.

The monetary problems associated with the Mongol collapse had a significant impact on the willingness of the Chinese people to accept government issued paper currency during the early years of the Ming dynasty. When the still financially weak administration of Emperor T'ai-tsu (r. 1368–98) printed its own paper notes in the mid-1370s, for example, the notes were greeted with a decided lack of enthusiasm. Like their late Yüan predecessors, these Ming notes could not be converted into gold, silver, or cloth, and, as the figures in Table 8.1 indicate, they declined rapidly in value.

²³ As in many other pre-modern societies, deteriorating economic and political conditions in late imperial China usually led to the minting of inferior coins. The late Yüan period was no exception as both counterfeiters and anti-government rebels produced substantial quantities of such coins. See P'eng Hsin-wei, *Chung-kuo huo-pi shih*, rev. ed. (Shanghai, 1965), pp. 570–71.

Despite the failure of this key element in its monetary policy, the early Ming government continued to issue large quantities of paper notes, some of which were used as gifts to imperial relatives and the nobility, as grants and salary payments to government officials, and as presents to foreign diplomatic and trading missions. Because the notes were falling in value throughout the early Ming period, however, and because they had no monetary value whatsoever outside of China, they probably were spent as quickly as possible, thus causing them to decline even further in value. Efforts by the early Ming government to halt that decline, including periodic bans on the use of copper coins and precious metals in commercial transactions, were unsuccessful. Therefore, although government issued paper notes continued to circulate on a limited basis for much of the rest of the dynasty, they did not play a significant role in the economic life of most Chinese. By the early fifteenth century, if not before, China had entered a new monetary age in which unminted silver traded by weight²⁴ and copper coins, both legal and counterfeit, were the dominant forms of currency.

Given this situation, the early Ming government's attitude towards both bullion mining and the minting of copper coins is somewhat puzzling. As has been noted, when the Yüan monetary system collapsed in the mid-fourteenth century, the value of silver in China rose sharply.²⁵ Between 1346 and 1375, for example, the country's gold-silver ratio appears to have narrowed from 1:10 to about 1:4 (see Table 8.2), thus making silver much more valuable in China, in terms of gold, than anywhere else in Eurasia.

²⁴ For reasons that are not completely clear but that reflect the state's imperfect control over several key aspects of economic life, pre-modern governments in China seldom minted gold and silver coins except for essentially ceremonial purposes. The basic unit for uncoined silver, which was much preferred to gold as a medium of exchange during the late imperial period, was one *liang* or "tael" (approximately 0.0375 kilograms). Silver circulated in "ingots" of varying weights and fineness, however, thus necessitating the frequent use of assayers from "cash shops" (*ch'ien-p'u*), "silver shops" (*yin-p'u*), or "silver artisan shops" (*yin-chiang p'u*) to guarantee the quality of the metal being presented as payment. See Lien-sheng Yang, *Money and credit in China: A short history*, 2nd printing (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. 79; and Joe Cribb, "A historical survey of the precious metal currencies of China," *Numismatic Chronicle*, 7th Ser., 19 (1979), pp. 185–209.

²⁵ Although the precise timing for silver's rise in value in mid-fourteenth-century China has yet to be determined, it may be significant that similar though somewhat smaller increases have been dated in Florence to the years 1345–47 and in Cairo to the years between 1339 and 1347. At least one scholar believes that these monetary fluctuations in Italy and Egypt had their origins in as yet unknown events somewhere in "the Far East or Middle East." See Cipolla, *The monetary policy of fourteenth-century Florence*, pp. 15, 19–20. One traditional explanation for silver's rise in value in late Yüan China has been that the Mongols took large quantities of the metal back to Mongolia with them when they fled from their capital at Ta-tu in 1368. However, since the bullion reserves of the Yüan treasuries were low long before 1368, and because it is likely that the Mongols would have taken gold as well as silver back with them if they could, it seems reasonable to speculate that international shortages of silver at this time, along with hoarding caused by economic and political uncertainties at home, are more plausible explanations for the rise in silver's value in China.

TABLE 8.2

Bimetallic ratios between gold and silver in China, 1282–1431

Year	Units of silver to one unit of gold
1282	7.5
1287	10.0
1309	10.0
1346	10.0
1375	4.0
1385	5.0
1386	6.0
1397	5.0
1407	5.0
1413	7.5
1426	4.0
1431	6.0

Source: Ch'üan Han-sheng, "Sung Ming chien pai-yin kou-mai-li ti yen-pien chi ch'i yüan-yin," *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Feb. 1967), pp. 160–61.

Nor was silver's dramatic rise in value at this time limited to its relationship with gold. For example, research by Ch'üan Han-sheng indicates that during early Ming times, one unit of silver bought perhaps twice as much rice and nearly three times as much silk as had been the case during much of the Sung and Yüan periods.²⁶ Under these circumstances, it might have been expected that Ming T'ai-tsu would have immediately encouraged bullion and particularly silver mining to bolster his new government's economic position. Determined to implement his own paper currency system, however, and apparently concerned about what he saw as the potential exploitation of workers in large-scale mining operations, T'ai-tsu permitted only limited official mining during his thirty-year reign²⁷ (1368–98). It thus seems possible that silver production in China during the late fourteenth century never exceeded 100,000 *liang* (approximately 3,750 kilograms) annually.²⁸ In some years during that period, total production may have been far below that. Since the early Ming government was generally unsuccessful in persuading the Chinese people to use its paper notes, perhaps the most important consequences of this restrictive mining policy were to curtail monetary growth and keep the value of silver in China extraordinarily high by world standards.

26 Ch'üan Han-sheng, "Sung Ming chien pai-yin kou-mai-li ti yen-pien chi ch'i yüan-yin," *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, 8, No. 1 (Feb. 1967), pp. 163–68.

27 *MS*, 7, p. 1970; *Minsbi shokkasbi yakuchü*, ed. Wada Sei (Tokyo, 1957), Vol. 2, pp. 777–79; and Momose Hiromu, "Mindai no ginsan to gaikoku gin ni tsuite," *Seikyü gakusō*, 19 (1935), p. 93.

28 Ch'üan Han-sheng, "Ming-tai yin-k'o yü yin-ch'an-é," *Hsin-ya shu-yüan hsüeh-shu nien-k'an*, 9 (1966), pp. 246–54. For a different interpretation of the level of mining activity in early Ming China, see the chapter by Martin Heijdra elsewhere in this volume.

Nor did the early Ming government achieve much success with its copper coinage. Although T'ai-tsu had minted copper coins even before he ascended the Ming throne in 1368, shortages of raw copper²⁹ and the emperor's desire to see his new paper currency accepted meant that neither he nor his advisors paid sufficient attention to the financial and technical details of producing a sound, low-value metallic currency under strict government supervision. At times, the early Ming authorities were so concerned that officially minted coins would compete with government-issued paper notes that they halted coin production entirely and, as was noted earlier, even ordered temporary bans on the use of such coins in commercial transactions. Neither of these policies was successful, but they had a significant impact on both the quantity and quality of the copper coins in circulation. For example, the largest number of coins issued by the Ming government in any one year during the late fourteenth century is thought to have been just over 220 million coins in 1372. During some years in the Northern Sung dynasty (960–1127), the Chinese state had found it necessary to produce between two and three billion copper coins annually.³⁰ The Ming government's failures in this area – failures that were never corrected by T'ai-tsu's successors – meant that good quality copper coins were in short supply in many areas of the country throughout the dynasty. However, because copper coins were sorely needed for lower level domestic transactions in some regions, and for international trade with Japan and Southeast Asia, this scarcity led to the continued circulation of coins from earlier dynasties and to widespread counterfeiting. At the same time, the need for a high value currency for large-scale commercial transactions in both the domestic and international markets brought about an increased reliance on unminted silver as a medium of exchange.³¹

The availability of silver as such a medium of exchange received a significant boost with the usurpation of the Ming throne by Emperor Ch'eng-tsu (r. 1403–24) in 1402. Not only did Ch'eng-tsu actively encourage government controlled foreign trade, which probably resulted in increased silver imports from other parts of Eurasia, but he also reversed T'ai-tsu's restrictive policy on bullion mining and opened or reopened mines in many parts of the Ming empire. As the figures in Table 8.3 suggest, this new policy resulted in

29 On these shortages, see *MS*, Vol. 7, p. 1962; and Albert Chan, *The glory and fall of the Ming dynasty* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1982), p. 132. On copper mining and copper coinage in Ming China, see also the chapter by Martin Heijdra elsewhere in this volume.

30 Ray Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century Ming China* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 75.

31 Although unminted gold circulated in small quantities during the Ming period, it served mainly as a store of value, not as a medium of exchange.

TABLE 8.3

*Ming government revenues from domestic silver mining, 1401–1520**

Decade	Kilograms	Annual average (kg)†
1401–10	48,719+	5,413+
1411–20	108,960	10,896
1421–30	74,760+	7,476+
1431–40	47,920+	5,324+
1441–50	10,866	1,811
1451–60	13,630	2,272
1461–70	23,051+	2,305+
1471–80	22,097+	2,210+
1481–90‡	30,090	3,009
1491–1500	19,896	1,900
1501–10	12,195	1,220
1511–20	12,345	1,235

*There are no reliable figures on domestic bullion mining in Ming China after 1520.

†No information on government silver receipts is available for the years 1401, 1435, 1441–43, and 1450–54. Totals for the decades in which those years fell are thus lower than they should be and annual averages have been computed on the basis of those years for which information is available.

‡From 1487 to 1520, government revenues from gold and silver mining were reported together. However, since the amount of gold that was mined is thought to have been very small, the totals are listed here as if they were only for silver.

Source: Ch'üan Han-sheng, "Ming-tai yin-k'o yü yin-ch'an-ê," *Hsin-ya shu-yüan hsieh-shu nien-k'an*, Vol. 9 (1966), pp. 246–54.

a significant though temporary increase in the amounts of silver collected annually by the Ming central government as "mining taxes."

Although the totals in Table 8.3 represent only official receipts from mining and not total production, Liang Fang-chung, Momose Hiromu, and Ch'üan Han-sheng believe that the Ming government took about 30 percent of all the bullion that was mined in official or officially sanctioned mines. The extent of "illegal" mining is not known, but it seems likely that during the first three decades of the fifteenth century, substantial quantities of silver were being mined in China that were not flowing directly into government hands. Given the generally favorable economic conditions in China at that time, and given silver's continued high purchasing power, it also seems likely that much of the newly mined silver found its way into general circulation. One sign that this was the case was the decision of the Ming government in 1436 to permit people in parts of Nan-Chihli and the provinces of Chekiang, Kiangsi, Hukwang, Fukien, Kwangtung, and Kwangsi to commute some of their tax payments to silver.³² This decision was significant because it meant that the commutation of taxes into silver payments had become an offi-

32 On the background to this decision, see Hok-lam Chan, "The Chien-wen, Yung-lo, Hung-hsi, and Hsüan-te reigns, 1399–1435." In *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 294–98. See also Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, pp. 52–53.

cially sanctioned alternative which could be used when there was sufficient silver circulating in a given area to permit it.

The tax commutations announced in 1436 did not mean that the Ming dynasty's monetary problems had been solved, however. To the contrary, as the figures in Table 8.3 suggest, beginning in the 1430s, and perhaps even before, China's increasing dependence on unminted silver as a medium of exchange may have been accompanied by a significant decline in domestic silver production.³³ Given the special nature of the Ming currency system, such a development naturally would have had a serious and very negative impact on the money supply's rate of growth. Nor was the dynasty's monetary situation aided by the government's continuing inability to produce an adequate supply of copper coins,³⁴ by the continued export of such coins to Japan and Southeast Asia,³⁵ or by the hoarding of precious metals that probably occurred during the severe economic and political troubles of the Cheng-t'ung, Ching-t'ai, and T'ien-shun reigns (1436–64).³⁶ The seriousness of the monetary contraction in China during the mid-fifteenth century is perhaps indicated by the fact that despite the beginnings of substantial imports of raw copper from Japan,³⁷ even the Ming empire's active and resourceful counterfeiters had difficulty producing acceptable coins at this time.³⁸

Economic and political conditions in China improved somewhat during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries,³⁹ a situation that was probably accompanied by diminished hoarding of precious metals and by increased

33 For a different interpretation, see the chapter by Martin Heijdra elsewhere in this volume.

34 The government apparently produced no coins at all between the 1430s and the late fifteenth century. See Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 75.

35 For a recent discussion of these exports, see Tetsuo Kamiki and Kozo Yamamura, "Silver mines and Sung coins – A monetary history of medieval and modern Japan in international perspective." In *Precious metals in the later medieval and early modern worlds*, ed. J. F. Richards (Durham, North Carolina, 1983), pp. 336–46; and John K. Whitmore, "Vietnam and the monetary flow of Eastern Asia, thirteenth to eighteenth centuries." In *Precious metals*, ed. Richards, pp. 363–70.

36 On those troubles, see Denis Twitchett and Tilemann Grimm, "The Cheng-t'ung, Ching-t'ai, and T'ien-shun Reigns, 1436–1464." In *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 309–37. The extent to which China's economic difficulties at this time were related to similar difficulties elsewhere in Eurasia remains to be thoroughly investigated.

37 On Sino-Japanese diplomatic and commercial relations at this time, see Tanaka Takeo, "Japan's relations with overseas countries." In *Japan in the Muromachi age*, eds. John Whitney Hall and Toyoda Takeshi (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1977), pp. 168–71; and Kawazoe Shoji, "Japan and East Asia," trans. G. Cameron Hurst III, *Medieval Japan*, Vol. 3, ed. Kozo Yamamura, *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge, England, 1990), pp. 423–46.

38 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 76.

39 On this period, see Frederick W. Mote, "The Ch'eng-hua and Hung-chih Reigns, 1465–1505." In *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 341–402. See also Willard J. Peterson, *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-chih and the impetus for intellectual change* (New York and London, 1979), pp. 70–71; and John Meskill, trans., *Ch'oe P'u's Diary: A record of drifting across the sea* (Tucson, 1965) pp. 93–94.

imports of silver from abroad.⁴⁰ Even so, the Ming economy continued to operate under severe monetary constraints. Paper currency remained unacceptable to the Chinese public, the government's attempts to reform its copper coinage were largely unsuccessful, and domestic bullion production was low and may even have been declining.⁴¹ Given the rapid population growth that is thought to have occurred in China after about 1500,⁴² it might have been expected that the country soon would have experienced painfully slow monetary growth or, because of the wear and tear involved in the trading of precious metals, even monetary contraction. Those possibilities were avoided by the continued counterfeiting of copper coins and, even more importantly, by what can safely be called a "revolution" in world monetary history.

MINING IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE NEW WORLD AND ITS IMPACT ON SINO-WESTERN TRADE

The first phase of this revolution began in the 1450s and 1460s with sharply increased bullion production in central Europe.⁴³ Between about 1460 and 1530, for example, silver output in Saxony, Bohemia, Hungary, and the Tyrol went up by about 500 percent to an estimated 90,000 kilograms a year. Similar increases were recorded in Sweden and, by 1500, this new mining "boom" had replaced much of the precious metal that had been lost during the great Eurasian "bullion famines" of the previous six or seven decades. The last few years of the fifteenth century saw government mints all over Europe spring back to life "as bullion was once again available to be struck into coin, the life blood of economic activity."⁴⁴ These developments were important to the economy of Ming China for two reasons. First, the newly mined European silver (and copper) helped to stimulate and sustain economic activity in western Eurasia, once again permitting European and

40 As will be discussed below, silver production in Europe increased substantially during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Some of that increased production was soon being used in international trade between Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. How much of European silver ended up in China can not be determined since virtually all of it would have been melted down and cast into ingots. Nevertheless, at least one fifteenth-century Venetian silver *grosso* has been discovered in a tomb in Canton which dates from the late 1480s or early 1490s. See John U. Nef, "Silver production in Central Europe, 1450-1618," *Journal of Political Economy*, 49, No. 4 (August 1941), pp. 575-91; Hsia Nai, "Yang-chou La-ting wen mu-pei yü Kuang-chou Wei-ni-ssu yin-pi," *K'ao-ku*, 6 (June, 1979), pp. 532-37; and M. Scarpari, "Chung-kuo fa-hsien ti shih-wu shih-chi Wei-ni-ssu yin-pi," *K'ao-ku*, 6 (June, 1979), pp. 538-41.

41 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 243. See also Ch'üan Han-sheng, "Ming-Ch'ing shih-tai Yün-nan ti yin-k'o yü yin-ch'an ê," *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, 11 (March 1976), pp. 65-66; and Table 8.3.

42 On this demographic growth, see the chapter by Martin Heijdra elsewhere in this volume.

43 Nef, "Silver production in Central Europe," pp. 575-91.

44 Harry A. Miskimin, *The economy of later Renaissance Europe, 1460-1600* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 32.

Middle Eastern elites to indulge their passions for “Oriental luxuries.” By the 1490s, if not before, substantial quantities of European silver were once again flowing through the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern trading regions to pay for pepper, spices, silks, cottons, and at least some of the late fifteenth-century Chinese porcelains that can be found in Istanbul, Tehran, Baghdad, and Cairo today. As one specialist in Asian ceramics has pointed out, it was precisely during the last few decades of the fifteenth century that “a second great wave of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain hit the Near East.”⁴⁵ As we have seen, that wave soon carried on into Italy, Portugal, and other areas in western Europe.

Secondly, increased silver production in Europe during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was important to the Chinese economy because it helped to finance the great “voyages of exploration” that led to the discovery of the mineral wealth of the New World. Initially drawn to the American mainland by the prospect of finding gold, by the 1530s and 1540s the Spanish were making even more spectacular strikes of silver. The most important of these silver strikes occurred at Zacatecas, Guanajuato, and San Luis Potosí in New Spain (modern Mexico) and at Potosí and other areas in the Charcas district of Upper Peru (modern Bolivia). Silver from these mines flowed into international circulation almost immediately, but it was not until the mercury amalgamation process of refining was disseminated throughout Spanish America after about 1550 that production there soared to the heights that were to transform world monetary history. At Potosí in Upper Peru mercury was first used in the early 1570s with the dramatic results that can be seen in Table 8.4.⁴⁶

By the mid-1570s, silver from Potosí and other New World mines was flowing to China along three main trade routes, the most important of which ran from Acapulco on the west coast of modern Mexico to Manila in the Philippine

45 Carswell, “Blue-and-white in China, Asia, and the Islamic world,” p. 31. See also Peter Spufford, *Money and its use in medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 367. Concerning the increased availability of silver in Europe and the Middle East at this time, Halil Sahillioglu has written: “At the beginning of the Early Modern Age, enhanced economic development experienced in Europe encouraged the minting of new large silver coins. The Ottomans, following suit, in 1470 introduced into circulation a large silver coin of 10.14 grams . . .” See Sahillioglu, “The role of international monetary and metal movements in Ottoman monetary history.” In *Precious Metals*, ed. Richards, p. 271. On exports of silver from Europe to Egypt at this time, see Frederic C. Lane, *Venice and history* (Baltimore, 1966), p. 299.

46 Peter Bakewell, “Mining in colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin America*, Vol. 2, ed. Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 108–49; Peter Bakewell, *Miners of the Red Mountain: Indian labor in Potosí, 1545–1650* (Albuquerque, 1984), pp. 13–26. For a useful summary of economic conditions in Potosí during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see John Lynch, *Spain and America 1598–1700*, Vol. 2 of *Spain under the Habsburgs*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1981), pp. 231–44.

TABLE 8.4

Silver production at Potosí, Peru, 1556–1650

Quinquennium	Average annual production (kilograms)
1556–60	58,686
1561–65	62,458
1566–70	57,014
1571–75	41,048
1576–80	124,050
1581–85	187,591
1586–90	202,453
1591–95	218,506
1596–1600	192,235
1601–05	208,359
1606–10	179,618
1611–15	183,347
1616–20	158,214
1621–25	153,065
1626–30	148,008
1631–35	141,090
1636–40	167,726
1641–45	129,273
1646–50	137,540

Source: Harry A. Cross, "South-American Bullion Production and Export, 1550–1750." In John F. Richards, ed., *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds* (Durham, North Carolina, 1983), p. 422.

Islands.⁴⁷ As John E. Wills, Jr., has discussed elsewhere in this volume, the Spanish conquered the Philippines during the 1560s and made Manila their capital in 1571. Within a very short time, the city became the focal point of a vigorous and very lucrative trade between the New World and China.⁴⁸ One indication of the speed with which trade grew in Manila is that the number of Chinese living and trading there rose from about forty in 1570–71 to perhaps

47 Literature on this subject is voluminous. In Chinese, see the three excellent studies by Ch'üan Han-sheng in his *Chung-kuo ching-chi shih lun-ls'ung* (Hong Kong, 1974), Vol. 1, pp. 417–73. Professor Ch'üan has summarized his findings in English in "The Chinese silk trade with Spanish America from the late Ming to the Mid-Ch'ing period," *Studia Asiatica: Essays in Asian Studies in Felicitation of the 75th Birthday of Professor Ch'en Shou-yi*, ed. Laurence G. Thompson (San Francisco, 1975), pp. 99–117. For more recent discussions in English, see Cross, "South American Bullion Production and Export." In *Precious Metals*, ed. Richards, pp. 412–13; John J. TePaske, "New world silver, Castile, and the Philippines, 1590–1800." In *Precious Metals*, ed. Richards, pp. 425–45; Eugene Lyon, "Track of the Manila galleons," *National Geographic*, 178, No. 3 (September 1990), pp. 3–37; and William M. Mathers, "Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion," *National Geographic*, 178, No. 3 (September 1990), pp. 38–53.

48 In addition to the Wills chapter in this volume, see also Ch'en Ching-ho, *Shih-liu shih-chi chih Fei-lu-pin bua-ch'iao* (Hong Kong, 1963); Albert Chan, "Chinese-Philippine relations in the late sixteenth century and to 1603," *Philippine Studies*, 24 (1978), pp. 51–82; and Wang Gung-wu, "Merchants without empire: The Hokkien sojourning communities." In *The rise of merchant empires*, ed. Tracy, pp. 400–21. Professor Ch'en's book has been published in English with some revisions under the title *The*

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10,000 in 1588 and 30,000 in 1603. In 1573, only two years after direct Sino-Spanish trade in the Philippines had begun, two galleons returned to Mexico with a cargo of Chinese goods that included raw silk, silk and cotton textiles, and more than 22,000 pieces of Ming porcelain.⁴⁹

During the late 1570s and 1580s the rapid growth of Sino-Spanish trade in the Pacific became the talk and envy of merchants and governments throughout the western world. For example, as diplomatic and commercial relations between Britain and Spain worsened during this period, freebooters such as Francis Drake and Thomas Cavendish formulated plans to capture a Manila Galleon, one of the huge silver-laden ships that crossed the Pacific nearly every year from Acapulco to the Philippines.⁵⁰ They never succeeded, but even the smaller prizes they took were spectacular. When Drake siezed a small Spanish coastal vessel off modern Ecuador in February 1579, for example, it contained 1,300 bars of silver,⁵¹ fourteen chests of silver coins, and an unknown quantity of gold, jewels, and Chinese porcelain.⁵² Cavendish's famous 1587 prize, the galleon Santa Ana, was on its way back to Acapulco from Manila with a cargo of Chinese silks, porcelains, gold, and other goods said to have been worth more than 2 million *pesos* in American and European markets. Converted directly into bullion by weight at that time, 2 million *pesos* would have equaled approximately 60,000 kilograms of silver.⁵³

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Chinese community in the sixteenth-century Philippines (Tokyo, 1968). Recent work on Sino-Spanish trade in Manila has been by Lin Jen-ch'uan (Lin Renchuan) in his *Ming-mo Ch'ing-ch'ü ssu-jen hai-shang mao-i* (Shanghai, 1987), pp. 188–92. See also his “Fukien's private sea trade in the 16th and 17th centuries.” In *Development and decline of Fukien province in the 17th and 18th centuries*, ed. E. B. Vermeer (Leiden, 1990), pp. 163–215; and Chang Pin-tsun, “Maritime trade and local economy in late Ming Fukien.” In *Development and decline of Fukien province in the 17th and 18th centuries*, ed. Vermeer, pp. 63–81.

- 49 Substantial quantities of this and later porcelain can be found on display in churches and other public buildings in the New World today. See Lyon, “The track of the Manila galleon,” p. 31; and Mudge, *Chinese export porcelain in North America*, pp. 35–84.
- 50 In addition to the sources listed in note 46, important material on the Manila Galleons can be found in William L. Schurz, *The Manila galleon* (New York, 1939); C. R. Boxer, “*Plata es Sangre*: Sidelights on the Drain of Spanish-American Silver in the Far East, 1530–1750,” *Philippine Studies*, 18 (1970), pp. 457–68; O. H. K. Spate, *The Spanish lake* (London, 1979), pp. 176–291; and Charles P. Kindleberger, *Spenders and boarders: The world distribution of Spanish American silver, 1550–1750* (Singapore, 1989), pp. 23–25.
- 51 Although the weight of these bars is not known, bars of silver discovered in the wreck of the seventeenth-century Spanish escort galleon Nuestra Señora de Atocha in 1983 weighed 70 pounds each. See Roger C. Smith, “Treasure Ships of the Spanish Main: The Iberian-American maritime empires.” In *Ships and shipwrecks of the Americas*, ed. George F. Bass (London, 1988), p. 94.
- 52 It is possible that one of the porcelain bowls taken by Drake at this time is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. See *The treasure houses of Britain: Five hundred years of private patronage and art collecting*, ed. Gervase Jackson-Stops (Washington, DC, 1985), p. 209.
- 53 Schurz, *The Manila galleon*, pp. 305–08. According to figures compiled by Ch'üan Han-sheng and Li Lung-hua, total annual silver receipts by the Ming central government at this time were about 140,000 *kilograms*. See Ch'üan and Li, “Ming chung-yeh hou T'ai-ts'ang sui-ju yin-liang ti yen-chiu,” pp. 136–39.

Given these impressive figures, it is unfortunate that the total value of the trade between China and the New World during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries cannot be established with any precision. Official Spanish statistics on the trade do exist,⁵⁴ but they appear to be unreliable because the officials who prepared them often were deeply involved in illegal commercial dealings themselves. This was true even during the early years of the trade⁵⁵ and, in the early 1630s, a church council in Manila warned the Spanish king that, in addition to the 400,000 *pesos* of silver that were shipped legally from Acapulco to Manila every year, “it is certain that two million [*pesos*, or approximately 57,500 kilograms of silver] are brought. That sum is brought and your judges and officials dissimulate because of the great profit that falls to them in Acapulco.”⁵⁶

If these figures are accurate, this would mean that perhaps five to six times the “legal” amount of silver was being shipped from the New World to Manila during the early 1630s, a time when Sino-Spanish trade is known to have been well past its late sixteenth-, early seventeenth-century peak. Corruption of such magnitude means that it is virtually impossible to know how much Spanish-American silver passed through the Philippines on its way to China during the late Ming period. The leading Chinese expert on the subject, Ch’üan Han-sheng, believes that in a good year during the early seventeenth century, the total may have been between 2 million and 3 million *pesos* (57,500–86,250 kilograms of silver).⁵⁷ The amounts involved could have been very much higher, however. In 1602, officials in Mexico informed the Spanish crown that, although the silver shipped from Acapulco to the Philippines usually amounted to 5 million *pesos* (143,750 kilograms) a year, in 1597, the total sent to Manila had reached the astonishing sum of 12 million *pesos* (345,000 kilograms).⁵⁸

⁵⁴ These statistics have been explored by Pierre Chaunu, *Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Ibériques* (Paris, 1960); and TePaske, “New World silver, Castile, and the Philippines.” See also Ward Barrett, “World Bullion Flows, 1450–1800.” In *The rise of merchant empires*, ed. Tracey, pp. 248–50.

⁵⁵ See, for example, “Letter from the Royal Fiscal to the King.” In *The Philippine Islands*, eds. E. H. Blair and J. A. Robertson (Cleveland, Ohio, 1903–09), Vol. 11, pp. 86–119; and Woodrow Borah, *Early colonial trade between Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954), pp. 120, 124–25.

⁵⁶ “Letter from the Ecclesiastical Cabildo to Felipe IV.” In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 24, eds. Blair and Robertson, pp. 254–55.

⁵⁷ Ch’üan Han-sheng, “Ming Ch’ing chien Mei-chou pai-yin ti shu-ju Chung-kuo,” in his *Chung-kuo ching-chi shih lun-ti’ung*, Vol. 1, p. 444. Drawing on the same material as Ch’üan, John Lynch agrees that these figures are possible. See Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs*, Vol. 2, pp. 244–46.

⁵⁸ Borah, *Early colonial trade between Mexico and Peru*, p. 123. See also TePaske, “New World silver, Castile, and the Philippines,” p. 436; and Boxer, “*Plata es Sangre*: Sidelights on the drain of Spanish-American silver in the Far East,” pp. 457–68. During the 1630s, a Spanish official in Manila wrote that the “king of China could build a silver palace with the silver bars from Peru which have been carried to his country . . . without . . . having been registered [in Acapulco].” This same official went on to say that “the kingdom of China is so full of merchandise, and the [Chinese] are so shrewd in

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A second route by which Spanish-American silver reached China began with the famous "treasure fleets" that carried gold and silver every year from the New World back to Spain. A few of these ships were lost to storms and piracy,⁵⁹ but most arrived safely in Seville where the bullion they carried helped to pay Spanish government debts and finance the crown's numerous and very expensive military operations. As it filtered into general circulation, that silver also helped to stimulate and sustain the economic expansion that was enjoyed by a number of areas in western Europe during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Drawing on the path-breaking work of Earl J. Hamilton, Harry A. Miskimin has provided figures, given in Table 8.5, for New World bullion imports into Spain during the years with which this chapter is concerned.

Of particular importance here is the fact that some of the New World silver that arrived in Spain during these years was sent to neighboring Portugal,⁶⁰ from where it was shipped to India, Southeast Asia, and China to purchase pepper, spices, raw silk, silk textiles, gold, and porcelain.⁶¹ Although reliable statistical information on direct Sino-Portuguese trade during this period is not available, it has been estimated that, as early as the 1530s, perhaps 40,000 to 60,000 pieces of Chinese porcelain were arriving in Lisbon from Asia

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commerce, and so keen after gain, that they know what quantity of merchandise is needed by the English, how much by the Dutch, and what quantity ought to be sold in all of Japan – and that with so great exactness that a tailor, after once seeing the figure of a person, decides how much goods is necessary to clothe him, they do the same in regard to us, and knowing that only two ships sail annually [from the Philippines to New Spain], they generally have in the [Chinese quarter in Manila] the quantity necessary to lade those ships." See Don Hieronimo de Banuelos y Carillo, "Relation of the Filipinas Islands." In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 29, eds. Blair and Robertson, pp. 71, 79. It should be noted that the Spanish ships in question were often among the largest in service anywhere in the world at that time.

59 On the gold and silver ships that were lost, see Smith, "Treasure Ships of the Spanish Main," pp. 85–106. It is of interest here that a number of these ships, including a converted merchant vessel called *La Concepcion* that was lost off the north coast of Hispaniola in 1641, carried Chinese silk and porcelain along with their main cargoes of bullion. In all probability, these Chinese goods had been shipped from China to Manila on Chinese merchant vessels, from Manila to Acapulco on one of the "Acapulco Galleons," and finally from Acapulco to Vera Cruz on the east coast of Mexico by mule train. It is known, for example, that *La Concepcion* departed Vera Cruz for Spain in June 1641 and, following a stop in Havana, was wrecked in October of that year. In August 1991, Ming porcelain recovered from *La Concepcion* was on display at the Museo de las Casas Reales in Santo Domingo, as was a gold chain from the same wreck which the museum's keepers believe is so fine that it could only be of Chinese workmanship.

60 Central European silver was also being shipped to Lisbon during this period for use in international trade. As Braudel has put it, by 1508 Europe "was being drained of its silver [through Antwerp] for the benefit of the Portuguese trade circuit." The circuit in question was Portugal's newly opened trade with Asia. See Braudel, *The Perspective of the World*, pp. 148–50.

61 C. R. Boxer, "Macao as a religious and commercial Entrepôt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," *Acta Asiatica*, No. 26 (1974), p. 70. On the outflow of gold from China during this period, see Ch'üan Han-sheng, "Ming chung-yeh hou Chung-kuo huang-chin ti shu-ch'u mao-i," *Chung-yang yen-chiu yüan Li-shih yü-yen chiu so chi-ke'an*, 53, Pt. 2 (1982), pp. 213–25.

TABLE 8.5

Imports of gold and silver from the New World into Spain, 1503–1660 (in kilograms)

Period	Silver	Gold
1503–10	—	4,965
1511–20	—	9,153
1521–30	148	4,889
1531–40	86,194	14,466
1541–50	177,573	24,957
1551–60	303,121	42,620
1561–70	942,859	11,531
1571–80	1,118,592	9,429
1581–90	2,103,028	12,102
1591–1600	2,707,627	19,451
1601–10	2,213,631	11,764
1611–20	2,192,256	8,886
1621–30	2,145,339	3,890
1631–40	1,396,760	1,240
1641–50	1,056,431	1,549
1651–60	443,257	469

Source: Harry A. Miskimin, *The Economy of Later Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 33.

each year.⁶² By the 1540s, the Lisbon elite is said to have been wearing Chinese silks, drinking Chinese tea, and placing special orders for Ming porcelain with Portuguese motifs.⁶³

Although the amounts of silver shipped to China on Portuguese vessels during the early sixteenth century were relatively small, they increased dramatically as New World silver production began to soar after about 1550. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese were probably carrying between 6,000 and 30,000 kilograms of silver annually to Macao, their colonial base on the Chinese coast near modern Hong Kong.⁶⁴ In 1601, for example, just one of three Portuguese ships bound for Macao from Southeast Asia was lost in the South China Sea with a cargo of spices and an estimated 10,000 kilograms worth of Portuguese silver coins.⁶⁵ Two years later, a Lisbon-bound carrack seized by the Dutch was carrying 1,200 bales of Chinese

62 Arez, *Portugal and Porcelain*, p. 18. See also Jean McClure Mudge, "Hispanic blue-and-white faience in the Chinese style." In *Blue and white: Chinese porcelain and its impact on the western world*, ed. John Carswell (Chicago, 1983), pp. 43–44.

63 Arez, *Portugal and porcelains*, pp. 16–17.

64 C. R. Boxer, *The great ship from Amacon* (Lisbon, 1959), pp. 62–64; C. R. Boxer, *Fidalgoes in the Far East* (The Hague, 1948), p. 6; Geoffrey Parker, "The emergence of modern finance in Europe." In *The Fontana Economic History of Europe: The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, ed. Carlo Cipolla (Glasgow, 1974), p. 528. On the role of the Portuguese in Macao during the late Ming period, see the chapter by John E. Wills, Jr., elsewhere in this volume.

65 Boxer, *The great ship from Amacon*, pp. 62–64.

raw silk and perhaps 200,000 pieces of Ming porcelain.⁶⁶ With figures such as this last one, it perhaps is not surprising to learn that patients in the Portuguese hospital at Goa regularly ate their meals on Chinese plates, that Ming porcelain was in common use among the Portuguese residents of sixteenth-century Brazil,⁶⁷ and that by the 1580s there were at least six shops in just one Lisbon street that specialized in the sale of Chinese porcelain.⁶⁸ This heyday of Sino-Portuguese trade is commemorated in Lisbon today in the so-called "Porcelain Room" of the old Santos Palace, the walls and ceiling of which are decorated with more than 200 pieces of Chinese blue-and-white, most of which date from the late Ming period.⁶⁹

The third route for Spanish-American silver going to China also began with the Spanish treasure fleets that sailed every year from the New World to Spain. In this case, however, some of the silver that arrived in Seville was shipped to Amsterdam and London, where, beginning in the early seventeenth century, ships of the Dutch and English East India Companies began to carry it to Asia to buy, among other things, pepper, spices, cottons, silks, and porcelains.⁷⁰ Concerning the involvement of Chinese merchants in this commerce, M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs has written:

To Bantam [the Chinese] brought raw and woven silk, silk thread, fine and heavy quality porcelain, musk, and other drugs, and vast quantities of ["copper"

66 Kristof Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic trade, 1620-1740* (The Hague, 1958), pp. 112-13; Arez, *Portugal and Porcelain*, p. 18.

67 Ships returning to Portugal from Asia frequently stopped in Brazil to take on supplies.

68 Arez, *Portugal and Porcelain*, p. 16. By the seventeenth century Portuguese merchants in France were also selling Chinese porcelain in the market at Saint-Germain outside Paris. The poet Paul Scarron celebrated this in verse:

Bring me to the Portuguese,
There we shall see something new,
The merchandise from China.
There we shall see gray amber,
Beautiful works of varnish,
And of fine porcelain
From this majestic country
Or, rather, from this paradise.

(Quoted in Chan, *The Glory and Fall*, p. 106.)

69 Mudge, "Hispanic blue-and-white," p. 43. Portuguese enthusiasm for, and access to, Chinese products had an impact on the rest of Europe. In 1562 the Archbishop of Portugal was shocked to discover gold and silver plates in use on the papal table and quickly extolled the virtues of porcelain: "[It is] so fine and translucent that its beauty is as great as glass or alabaster. Sometimes it has blue decoration, which appears to be a mixture of alabaster and sapphire . . . Such vessels are esteemed for their beauty . . ." Suitably impressed, the Pope ordered a Chinese porcelain service for himself, as did religious and political leaders all over western Europe. By the early seventeenth century the royal families of both France and England owned sets of Ming porcelain that had originally been purchased by Portuguese agents in Macao. See Duncan Macintosh, *Chinese blue and white porcelain*, 2nd ed. (London, 1986), pp. 132-34; and *The ceramic load of the Witte Leeuw (1613)*, ed. C. L. van der Pijl-Ketel (Amsterdam, 1982), p. 28.

70 On this subject, see F. S. Gastra, "The exports of precious metal from Europe to Asia by the Dutch East Asia Company, 1602-1795." In *Precious Metals*, ed. Richards, pp. 447-67; and Artur Attman, *Dutch Enterprise in the World Bullion Trade, 1500-1800* (Goteborg, 1983).

coins] . . . Thanks to the Europeans, they were able to export [silver] *reals* of eight . . . In fact their desire for European money was probably the main reason why they increased their shipments after the coming of the northern Europeans. Their export of *reals* from Bantam caused a shortage of these coins in the town, which indicates that the Dutch and the English did not have enough barter commodities to obtain the Chinese goods, particularly the silk and porcelain. At the same time it shows that Chinese imports to Bantam were on a very big scale when, besides large cargoes of pepper, costly sandalwood, ivory, tortoise-shell, etc., the merchants were able to take stocks of [silver] *reals* back to China as well.⁷¹

Although the total amount of silver shipped to China along this route is impossible to determine, estimates of Dutch silver exports to Asia, much of which ended up in Chinese hands, have been made by F.S. Gastra (see Table 8.6). As the quotation from Meilink-Roelofs above suggests, the Dutch became enthusiastic participants in the “China trade” almost as soon as they arrived in Asian waters in the early seventeenth century. As early as 1608, for example, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) placed a special order for more than 100,000 pieces of Chinese porcelain⁷² and, by 1614, Ming blue-and-white wares are said to have been “in daily use” among the ordinary citizens of Amsterdam.⁷³ Three years later, the VOC estimated its annual sales of Chinese raw silk in the Netherlands at 35,000 kilograms.⁷⁴

JAPANESE SILVER AND THE EXPANSION OF SINO-JAPANESE TRADE DURING THE LATE MING PERIOD

As the gold:silver ratios in Table 8.7 indirectly indicate, Japanese silver production increased sharply following the discovery of new bullion deposits in the western part of the country during the sixteenth century.

The sharp rise in Japanese silver production during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is partly attributable to the gradual unification of the country by military leaders such as Oda Nobunaga (1534–82), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), the latter

71 M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian trade and European influence in the Indonesian archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague, 1962), p. 246. On Sino-Dutch trade in Indonesia during the late Ming period, see also Leonard Blussé, *Strange company: Chinese settlers, Mestizo women, and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* (Dordrecht, Holland, 1986); and the chapter by John E. Wills, Jr., elsewhere in this volume.

72 Macintosh, *Chinese blue and white porcelain*, p. 135; and Colin Sheaf and Richard Kilburn, *The Hatcher porcelain cargoes* (Oxford, 1988), p. 21. Dutch traders were the likely source for the two Wan-li period (1573–1620) blue and white cups excavated recently at an English frontier settlement near Jamestown, Virginia. That settlement is known to have been occupied only from about 1618 to 1635, thus giving some indication of the speed with which Chinese porcelain traveled along new international trade routes. See Mudge, *Chinese export porcelain in North America*, pp. 88–89.

73 Quoted from a 1614 Dutch publication by C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (London, 1988), p. 195.

74 Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic trade*, pp. 8–10.

TABLE 8.6

Estimated silver exports to Asia by the Dutch East India Company, c. 1602–50

Period	Silver (in kilograms)
1602–10	53,726
1610–20	102,816
1620–30	123,360
1630–40	89,436
1640–50	90,464

Source: F. S. Gastra, "The Exports of Precious Metal from Europe to Asia by the Dutch East India Company, 1602–1795," in J. F. Richards, ed., *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds* (Durham, 1983), p. 475.

TABLE 8.7

*Bimetallic ratios of gold and silver in Japan, 1434–1622**

Year	Units of silver to one unit of gold
1434	4.66
1438	5.74
1447	4.04
1540	3.62
1571	7.37
1575	10.34
1579	8.77
1581	8.92
1583	9.19
1588	9.15
1589	11.06
1594	10.34
1604	10.99
1609	12.19
1610	11.84
1615	11.38
1620	13.05
1622	14.00

*It should be noted that the gold/silver ratio in Japan widened during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite the fact that Japanese gold production was also increasing, that gold was being imported into Japan from China and South Asia, and that substantial quantities of silver were being exported from the country.

Source: Tetsuo Kamiki and Kozo Yamamura, "Silver Mines and Sung Coins—A Monetary History of Medieval and Modern Japan in International Perspective," in John F. Richards, ed., *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds* (Durham, 1983), p. 346.

two of whom were particularly sensitive to the economic and political benefits of bullion mining.⁷⁵ Perhaps even more important than the move toward political unification, however, were the technological improvements in smelting and refining that were introduced into the country from abroad during the sixteenth century. By 1600, Japanese miners appear to have been familiar with most of the important techniques then being employed by their counterparts in other parts of the world.⁷⁶ Although reliable figures on overall Japanese bullion production during this period are not available, Tetsuo Kamiki and Kozo Yamamura have estimated that, between 1560 and about 1600, silver exports from the country averaged between 33,750 and 48,750 kilograms per year.⁷⁷ Although this estimate may be high, it is not impossible. Despite interference from the Ming government, which was alarmed by Japanese military power,⁷⁸ Japanese and Chinese traders are known to have exported large quantities of silver from Japan to China during this period.⁷⁹ They were joined in this activity by the Portuguese, who became important middlemen in Sino-Japanese trade during the mid-sixteenth century.⁸⁰ By the 1580s, the Portuguese alone probably were exporting more than 15,000 kilograms of silver from Japan every year, a total that is thought to have risen substantially by the end of the century.

Exports of Japanese silver continued to expand after the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603. The leading Japanese authority on the subject, Professor Kobata Atsushi, believes that, in some years during the early seventeenth century, combined exports of silver on Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, and Dutch ships may have reached between 150,000 and

75 Concerning Japanese bullion mining during the late sixteenth century, the Japanese chronicler Ōta Gyūichi (1527–after 1610) wrote the following: “Ever since the advent of the Taikō Hideyoshi [c. 1582], gold and silver have gushed forth from the mountains and from the plains in the lands of Japan . . . In the old days, no one as much as laid an eye on gold. But in this age, there are none even among peasants and rustics, no matter how humble, who have not handled gold and silver aplenty.” Quoted in George Elison, “The cross and the sword: Patterns of Momoyama history.” In *Warlords, artists, and commoners: Japan in the sixteenth century*, eds. George Elison and Bardwell L. Smith (Honolulu, 1981), p. 55.

76 Kobata Atsushi, *Kingin bōekishi no kenkyū* (Kyoto, 1976), pp. 221–28; Delmer M. Brown, *Money economy in medieval Japan: A study in the use of coins* (New Haven, 1951), pp. 56–61; and Kamiki and Yamamura, “Silver mines and Sung coins,” pp. 346–48.

77 Kamiki and Yamamura, “Silver mines and Sung coins,” p. 351.

78 For a recent discussion of this subject, see James Geiss, “The Chia-ching reign, 1522–1566.” In *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 490–505.

79 See, for example, Kobata, *Kingin bōekishi*, p. 59; Iwao Seiichi, *Shuinsen to Nihonmachi* (Tokyo, 1978), p. 78; Lin, “Fukien’s private sea trade,” pp. 181–83; and Wang, “The Hokkien sojourning communities,” pp. 414–19.

80 Literature on this subject is enormous. The classic study in English remains Boxer, *The great ship from Amacón*. See also George Bryan Souza, *The survival of empire: Portuguese trade and society in China and the South China Sea, 1630–1754* (Cambridge, 1986).

187,500 kilograms.⁸¹ This estimate has been accepted with slight modifications by other experts such as Iwao Seiichi and by Kamiki, and Yamamura.⁸² Although Ming government restrictions on direct Sino-Japanese trade meant that much of this silver first had to go to Macao, Taiwan, or Southeast Asia, most of it ended up in China where Chinese merchants eagerly exchanged it for silk, silk and cotton textiles, porcelain, gold, and other goods for the rapidly expanding Japanese domestic market. Some indication of that market's rate of growth can be gained from the fact that between the late sixteenth century and the early 1630s, Japanese imports of raw silk, most of which were from China, rose from an estimated 60,000–90,000 kilograms per year to perhaps as much as 280,000 kilograms.⁸³ Such figures help to explain the following statement by Father João Rodrigues, the well-known Portuguese Jesuit who lived and worked in Japan from 1577 until his expulsion by the Tokugawa authorities in 1610:

The use of silk in olden days, and even up to the time we went to Japan was rare and because of its scarcity and dearth the ordinary people did not use it, nor indeed did the gentry, and the lords but seldom . . . But since the time of [Hideyoshi, ca. 1582–1598] there has been a general peace throughout the kingdom and trade has so increased that the whole nation wears silk robes; even peasants and their wives have silk sashes and the better off among them have silken robes.⁸⁴

A Spanish merchant familiar with economic conditions in Japan during the early seventeenth century corroborates Rodrigues' account: "the [Japanese] people have come to dress more luxuriously than ever and the raw silk imported from China and Manila is now not sufficient to meet the demand . . ."⁸⁵

81 Kobata, "Jūroku, jūshichi seiki ni okeru Kyokutō no gin no ryūtsū." In *Kobata Atsushi Kyōju taikan kinen kōkushū ronshū*, ed. Kobata Atsushi Kyōju taikan kinen jikyōkai (Kyoto, 1970), p. 8.

82 Kamiki and Yamamura, "Silver mines and Sung coins," p. 352.

83 Kobata Atsushi, "Edo shoki ni okeru kaigai kōeki." In *Nihon keizai no kenkyū*, ed. Kobata Atsushi (Tokyo, 1978), p. 526; Yamawaki Teijirō, *Nagasaki no Tōjin hōeki* (Tokyo, 1972), pp. 9–11; Katō Eiichi, "The Japanese-Dutch trade in the Formative Period of the Seclusion Policy," *Acta-Asiatica*, No. 30 (1976), pp. 44–47; Iwao Seiichi, "Japanese foreign trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," *Acta-Asiatica*, No. 30 (1976), pp. 1–18; and François Caron and Joost Schouten, *A true description of the mighty kingdoms of Japan and Siam* (London, 1935), p. 51. See also Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the economy of Bengal, 1630–1720* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 118–22.

84 João Rodrigues, *This island of Japon*, trans. and ed. Michael Cooper (Tokyo, 1973), p. 133. See also Eliason, "The cross and the sword," pp. 55–56.

85 Bernardino de Avila-Giron quoted in Katō, "The Japanese-Dutch trade," p. 45. The silk imported into Japan from Manila at this time was also of Chinese origin. On the importance of foreign and especially Chinese trade for the early Tokugawa economy, see also Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), pp. 25–33. It has been estimated that by about 1618, between 2,000 and 3,000 Chinese merchants were trading annually in Nagasaki. See Iwao, "Japanese foreign trade," p. 11.

MONETARY FACTORS AFFECTING CHINESE FOREIGN TRADE
DURING THE LATE MING PERIOD

As was suggested earlier, one factor in the intense demand by the Chinese for foreign silver during the late Ming period was the special nature of the dynasty's monetary system. Because silver production in China was inadequate to satisfy domestic needs, the value of silver in the country remained very high by world standards right into the seventeenth century.⁸⁶ Chinese merchants were therefore delighted to find foreign traders who were willing to exchange silver for Chinese goods. As one Spanish observer noted about 1600, the Chinese who came to Manila wanted only silver for their products, "for they do not like gold, nor any other goods in exchange, nor do they carry any to China."⁸⁷

The high value placed on silver in China also helps to explain the great foreign interest in Chinese goods at this time. As J. H. Parry pointed out some years ago, "The trans-Pacific trade [between Manila and Acapulco] established direct contact between a society in which silver bullion was in high demand, and one in which it was plentiful and cheap."⁸⁸ Once they began trading in Manila during the early 1570s, the Spanish discovered that goods from China not only were superior in quality to those from Europe and the New World, but also much less expensive. During the mid-1570s, for example, Philip II of Spain was informed that the prices for Chinese goods in Manila were so low that "they are to be had almost for nothing."⁸⁹ Not surprisingly, most of those goods were shipped back to the New World, where they quickly ended the domination of markets there by commercial interests in Spain. In 1594, the Viceroy of Peru wrote the following to the governmental authorities in Madrid:

Chinese merchandise is so cheap and Spanish goods so dear that I believe it impossible to choke off the trade to such an extent that no Chinese wares will be consumed in this realm, since a man can clothe his wife in Chinese silks for

86 This was something well understood by European traders at the time. As Frank C. Spooner has written, "The avidity of the Chinese for silver established a commercial epoch for the international economy. Without this avidity, wrote [the Florintine merchant Filippo Sassetti] on January 20, 1586, 'the [Spanish] *reals* would not have risen so much in value as they now are. The Chinese, among all the peoples of Asia, are wild about silver as everywhere else men are about gold.' From Goa in 1588, the Portuguese Duarte Gomez also reported that China kept silver 'at a higher price than all of the powers of the world.'" See Frank C. Spooner, *The international economy and monetary movements in France, 1493-1725* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), p. 77.

87 Morga, *The Philippine Islands*, p. 340. See also Lin, "Fukien's private sea trade," p. 207.

88 J. H. Parry, "Transport and trade routes." In *The economy of expanding Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries*, Vol. 4, eds. E. E. Rich and C. H. Wilson, *The Cambridge History of Europe* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 209. See also Boxer, "*Plata es Sangre*: Sidelights on the drain of Spanish-American silver in the Far East," pp. 457-60.

89 "Letter from Juan Pacheco Maldonado to [Philip II of Spain]," in Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 3, p. 229.

200 *reales* [25 *pesos*], whereas he could not provide her with clothing of Spanish silks with 200 *pesos*.⁹⁰

Eight years later it was reported that the citizens of Lima were wearing silks that were “of the most fine and costly quality. The gala dresses and clothes of the women [in Lima] are so many and so excessive that in no other kingdom of the world are found such.”⁹¹ A similar situation existed in New Spain, where silk dresses known as *China poblana* became (and remain) the “national dress” of Mexican women.⁹² Describing the cargoes of the “China ships” (*naos de la China*) that arrived in Acapulco nearly every year from the Philippines, William L. Schurz has written:

Above all . . . these were silk ships. Silks in every stage of manufacture and of every variety of weave and pattern formed the most valuable part of their cargoes. There were delicate gauzes and Cantonese crepes . . . , velvets and taffetas and the . . . fine damask, rougher grograins and heavy brocades worked in fantastic designs with gold and silver thread. Of silken wearing apparel, there were many thousand pairs of stockings in each cargo . . . , skirts and velvet bodices, cloaks and robes and kimonos. And packed in the chests of the galleons were silken bed coverings and tapestries, handkerchiefs, tablecloths and napkins, and rich vestments for the service of churches and convents from Sonora to Chile. Nearly all this was of Chinese workmanship.⁹³

The high quality and low cost of these Chinese products combined to make a significant impact on New World industry. Shortly after they conquered the Aztec empire in the early sixteenth century, for example, the Spanish had encouraged the production of silk in Mexico. By the 1550s, the silk industry there was well established and it enjoyed substantial growth during the 1560s and 1570s. During the 1580s, however, Mexican silk producers began to experience serious economic difficulties, a major factor in which was competition from China:

The idea that the Philippine trade destroyed Mexican silk culture was advanced as early as 1582 when [a Spanish official] wrote that, since the Philippines were shipping such large quantities of Chinese cloths and yarns, there was no need to make the natives raise silk. At the time he reported, [Sino-Spanish trade in the Philippines] was but nine years old. In November 1573, the first shipment of Chinese

90 Quoted in Borah, *Early colonial trade*, p. 122.

91 Quoted in Schurz, *The Manila galleon*, pp. 365–66. All indications are that Ming porcelain was in common use in Peru as well. Shards of Chinese porcelain have even been found on the shore of Lake Titicaca some 15,000 feet above sea level. See p. 369; and Mudge, *Chinese export porcelain in North America*, p. 43.

92 Lyon, “Track of the Manila Galleon,” pp. 5–7.

93 Schurz, *The Manila galleon*, p. 32. Although silk and silk textiles constituted the main cargoes of the Acapulco-bound galleons, so much blue and white porcelain was eventually imported into Mexico that broken pieces known as *chinitas* came to be used as small change. See Mudge, *Chinese Export Porcelain in North America*, pp. 43–44.

damasks, satins, and other silks of all colors arrived in [Mexico] . . . During the next years galleons brought other shipments of Chinese clothing and silks, all of which found a ready sale. When, in November 1579, merchants returning with far more silks and clothing than before . . . realized even better profits, the trade grew rapidly.⁹⁴

As trade in Manila grew during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, production of raw silk in New Spain continued to decline. At the same time, however, the manufacture of silk products by Mexican weavers apparently increased. One reason for this was that as larger and larger quantities of Chinese raw silk were imported into Acapulco, silk guilds in Mexico City and other industrial centers used them to weave a wide variety of goods for the Spanish-American and even the European market.⁹⁵ One Spanish observer during the 1630s even claimed that because domestic supplies of raw silk in New Spain were insufficient to meet the demand, trade with China helped to keep 14,000 weavers in Mexico City, Puebla, and other cities employed.⁹⁶ It is even possible some of these weavers were Chinese, for there is evidence to suggest that a substantial Chinese community existed in Mexico City by the mid-1630s.⁹⁷ Other Chinese made the long voyage across the Pacific to settle in Acapulco or some of the important mining centers of New Spain.⁹⁸

94 Woodrow Borah, *Silk raising in colonial Mexico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1943), p. 89.

95 On this last point, see "Economic reasons for suppressing the silk trade of China in Spain and its colonies." In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 22, eds. Blair and Robertson, pp. 279–86.

96 Juan Grau y Monfalcon, "Informatory memorial of 1637." In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 27, eds. Blair and Robertson, p. 199. Similar situations existed in Japan and India at this time as weavers in manufacturing centers as far apart as Sakai, Kyoto, Revadanda, and Cheul were also dependent upon Chinese raw silk for at least a portion of their livelihoods. See Katō, "The Japan-Dutch Trade," pp. 45–50; Souza, *The survival of empire*, pp. 52–53; and Perlman, "Financial institutions and business practices," pp. 264–65. Future research may reveal that at least some of the famous "Persian silk" sold on Middle Eastern and European markets during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was also of Chinese origin. It is known, for example, that the Ottoman court received "Chinese fabrics" as war booty from Iran during the mid sixteenth century. See Esin Atil, *Süleymanname: The illustrated history of Süleyman the Magnificent* (Washington, DC, 1986), pp. 198–99.

97 In June 1635, judicial officials in Mexico City heard a complaint from Spanish barbers about the activities of their Chinese competitors. The authorities decided in favor of the Spanish barbers and recommended that the number of Chinese barbershops be limited to twelve, all of which were to be located in the suburbs of the capital. The authorities also criticized the Chinese for failing to employ Spanish apprentices. See Homer H. Dubs and Robert S. Smith, "Chinese in Mexico City in 1635," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 1, No. 4 (August 1942), pp. 387–89.

98 Schurz, *The Manila galleon*, p. 374; Mudge, "Hispanic blue-and-white," p. 50.

FOREIGN SILVER AND THE LATE MING ECONOMY

Although there have been some recent arguments to the contrary,⁹⁹ there seems little doubt that imports of New World and Japanese silver had a significant impact on the economy of late Ming China.¹⁰⁰ Statistical evidence of that impact can be found in the steep rise in silver receipts recorded by the Ming central government after 1570,¹⁰¹ in similar rises in silver collections by local governments along the southeastern coast,¹⁰² and in the dramatic changes that occurred in China's bimetallic ratios during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For example, although the purchasing power of silver in China for silk, porcelain, and many other products remained very high by world standards, between 1568 and 1644 the gold-silver ratio there widened from 1:6 to perhaps 1:10 or even 1:13.¹⁰³ Between 1577 and the early 1620s, on the other hand, China's silver:copper ratio narrowed from 1:229 to about 1:112.¹⁰⁴ In both cases, these changes reflect, at least in part, the massive imports of silver discussed above as well as the exports of unminted gold and copper coins that were such important factors in the growth of Ming trade with Japan and Southeast

99 See, for example, Jack A. Goldstone, "East and west in the seventeenth century: Political crises in Stuart England, Ottoman Turkey, and Ming China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (1988), pp. 108–09. For a discussion of Goldstone's views with some counter-arguments, see William S. Atwell, "A seventeenth-century 'general crisis' in East Asia?", *Modern Asian Studies*, 24, No. 4 (1990), pp. 661–82.

100 The following discussion borrows heavily from William S. Atwell, "International bullion flows and the Chinese economy circa 1530–1650," *Past and Present*, No. 95 (May 1982), pp. 80–86.

101 Between 1570 and 1577, the annual revenues of the T'ai-ts'ang Vault, which was the Ming central government's chief receiving agency for taxes collected in silver, reportedly increased from something over 86,500 kilograms of silver to something over 163,478 kilograms. This increase occurred, it should be noted, just after the Ming government had relaxed some of its restrictions on maritime trade (1567), just after Sino-Japanese trade had received a boost with the founding of Nagasaki (1570), and just at the time Sino-Spanish trade was beginning in earnest with the establishment of Manila as the Spanish capital in the Philippines (1571). By 1577, the amount of silver entering the T'ai-ts'ang Vault was nearly double the highest total recorded for the 1560s and, until the very end of the dynasty, silver receipts there probably never fell below 100,000 kilograms per year. While other factors contributed to these developments, it seems clear that the marked increase in government silver revenues during this period was directly related to an unprecedented increase in foreign trade and silver imports. For further discussion, see Ch'üan Han-sheng and Li Lung-hua, "Ming chung-yeh hou T'ai-ts'ang sui-ju yin-liang ti yen-chiu," *Chung-kuo wen-hua yen-chiu so hsieh-pao*, 5, No. 1 (1972), pp. 123–55.

102 During the late sixteenth century, Yüeh-kang in Fukien's Hai-ch'eng county became one of China's leading ports, with a trading network that stretched from Japan to Southeast Asia. Between about 1570 and 1594, silver collected as fees for certain licenses and customs duties in Hai-ch'eng increased from approximately 113 kilograms annually to more than 1,088 kilograms. It is now generally agreed that this increase was due almost entirely to the expansion of Yüeh-kang's foreign trade during these years and is thus indicative of the increased rate at which Japanese and Spanish-American silver was entering the Fukienese and ultimately the Chinese economy. See Ch'üan Han-sheng, *Chung-kuo ching-chi shih lun-t'ung*, 1:428; Lin, "Fukien's private sea trade," pp. 196–200; and Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 235.

103 P'eng, *Chung-kuo huo-pi shih*, p. 714.

104 P'eng, *Chung-kuo huo-pi shih*, p. 715.

Asia. Of particular significance here is the fact that these changes in bimetallic ratios paralleled similar changes in the New World, Europe, South Asia, and Japan, thus providing further evidence of the Ming empire's gradual integration into what some have called an "emerging world economy."¹⁰⁵

As the pace of that integration increased,¹⁰⁶ Ming China experienced a sharp increase in agricultural specialization and commercialization,¹⁰⁷ rapid growth in the silk, cotton, and porcelain industries,¹⁰⁸ a significant expansion in interregional trade,¹⁰⁹ and the widespread implementation of the so-called "Single-Whip Method" of taxation whereby most land taxes, labor service obligations, and extra levies were commuted to payments in

- 105 Spooner, *The international economy and monetary movements*, pp. 33–45; Frank Perlin, "Money-use in late pre-colonial India and the international trade in currency media." In *Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India*, ed. J. F. Richards (New Delhi, 1987), pp. 249–56; Irfan Habib, "A system of trimetalism in the age of the 'price revolution': Effects of the silver influx on the Mughal monetary system." In *The imperial monetary system*, ed. Richards, pp. 138–70; Harry E. Cross, "South American bullion production and export, 1550–1570." In *Precious Metals*, ed. Richards, pp. 398–400.
- 106 The following borrows heavily from William S. Atwell, "Note on silver, foreign trade, and the late Ming economy," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i*, 3, No. 8 (December 1977), pp. 1–33.
- 107 This is one of the main themes in Evelyn S. Rawski, *Agricultural Change and the Peasant Economy of South China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972). See also Ho Ping-ti, "The introduction of American food crops into China," *American Anthropologist*, 57 (April 1955), pp. 191–201; Ho Ping-ti, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368–1913* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 169–95; Dwight H. Perkins, *Agricultural Development in China, 1368–1968* (Chicago, 1969), chs. 3, 6, 7; Mark Elvin, "The last thousand years of Chinese history: Changing patterns in land tenure," *Modern Asian Studies*, 4, No. 2 (1970), pp. 104–05; and L. Carrington Goodrich, "The Columbian discovery: China and the New World," *Chinese Studies in History*, 8, No. 4 (Summer 1975), pp. 3–14.
- 108 For useful reviews of Chinese and Japanese scholarship on this growth, see Tanaka Masatoshi, "Chūgoku rekishi gakkai ni okeru 'Shihon shugi no hōga' kenkyū." In *Chūgoku shi no jidai kubun*, eds. Suzuki Shun and Nishijima Sadao (Tokyo, 1971), pp. 219–52; and Saeki Yūichi, "Nihon no Min-Shin jidai kenkyū ni okeru shōhin seisan hyōka o megutte." In *Chūgoku shi no jidai kubun*, eds. Suzuki and Nishijima, pp. 253–321. See also Ramon H. Myers, "Cotton textile handicraft and the development of the cotton textile industry in modern China," *The Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser., 2, No. 18 (1965), pp. 614–32; Ramon H. Myers, "Some issues on economic organization during the Ming and Ch'ing periods: A review article," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i*, 3, No. 2 (December 1974), pp. 77–93; Craig Dietrich, "Cotton culture and manufacture in early Ch'ing China." In *Economic Organization in Chinese Society*, ed. W. E. Willmott (Stanford, 1972), pp. 109–35; E-tu Zen Sun, "Sericulture and silk textile production in Ch'ing China," In *Economic organization in Chinese society*, ed. Willmott, pp. 79–108; Mi Chu Wiens, "Cotton textile production and rural social transformation in early modern China," *Chung-kuo wen-hua yen-chiu so hsieh-pao*, 7, No. 2 (December 1974), pp. 515–31; and Evelyn S. Rawski, "Ming society and the economy," *Ming Studies*, 2 (Spring, 1976), pp. 12–19.
- 109 See, for example, Miyazaki Ichisada, "Min-Shin jidai Sushū no keikōgyō no hattatsu," in his *Ajia shi kenkyū*, IV (Kyoto, 1964), p. 309; Ho Ping-ti, "The geographic distribution of Hui-kuan [Landsmannschaften] in Central and Upper Yangtze Provinces," *The Tsing-hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, New Ser., 5, No. 2 (December 1966), p. 121; Ng Chin-keong, "A study on the peasant society of South Fukien, 1506–1644," *Nanyang University Journal*, 6 (1972), pp. 208–09; Wiens, "Cotton textile production," *passim*.

silver.¹¹⁰ The impact of these developments was particularly noticeable in the economically advanced lower Yangtze region,¹¹¹ where urban centers such as Soochow, Sung-chiang, Chia-hsing, and Nanking flourished as perhaps never before. Already the capital of China's silk industry and one its leading financial centers, Soochow's population grew rapidly during the late sixteenth century to reach a total of well over 500,000, making it perhaps the world's largest and certainly one of its richest cities.¹¹² Nearby Sung-chiang owed its prosperity during these years not to silk, but rather to cotton, a crop which had been grown in southeastern China since late Yüan times. As domestic and foreign demand¹¹³ for cotton goods soared in the late sixteenth century, more and more people in the environs of Sung-chiang turned to weaving and trading full time. As was the case in Soochow, Sung-chiang's population rose dramatically during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and even the small marketing towns in the nearby countryside became thriving centers of dyeing, sizing, and related occupations.¹¹⁴

Finally, as Fu I-ling, Ng Chin-keong, Evelyn S. Rawski, Shiba Yoshinobu, Chang Pin-tsun, Lin Jen-ch'uan, and others have demonstrated, the expansion of trade with Asia, Europe, and the New World had a profound impact on those areas of China that were directly involved in maritime commerce.

110 That the successful implementation of the "Single-Whip Reforms" was directly related to silver imports from Japan, Europe, and the New World seems incontrovertible. First, most of the important early experiments with the reform were conducted in coastal Fukien and Chekiang, two of the areas most directly involved in maritime commerce. Second, the implementation of the reforms "reached its height," according to Professor Ray Huang, during the last three decades of the sixteenth century, a time when silver imports into China had just begun to soar. Finally, three of the most influential "single-whip" reformers, Hai Jui (1513–87), P'ang Sheng-p'eng (1524?–81?), and Wang Tsung-mu (1523–91), were all natives of the southeastern coast and thus undoubtedly aware of the special monetary and economic conditions that existed there. On these points, see Liang Fang-chung, *The single-whip method of taxation in China*, tr. Wang Yü-ch'uan (Cambridge, Mass, 1956); Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, pp. 112–33.

111 F. W. Mote, "The transformation of Nanking, 1350–1400." In *The city in late Imperial China*, ed. G. William Skinner (Stanford, 1977), p. 151.

112 Iwami Hiroshi, "Gekidō suru shakai," Tamura Jitsuzō, ed., *Saigai no tōyōteki s'akai* (Tokyo, 1968), p. 133; Miyazaki, "Min-Shin jidai Sushū," pp. 306–20; F. W. Mote, "A millennium of Chinese urban history: Form, time, and space concepts in Soochow," *Rice University Studies*, 29, No. 4 (Fall 1973), pp. 44–45.

113 By the late sixteenth century, for example, "white [Chinese] cotton cloth of different kinds and quantities" was being imported into Mexico from the Philippines. Antonio da Morga: quoted in Pauline Simmons, *Chinese patterned silks* (New York, 1948), p. 25.

114 Literature on this subject in Chinese and Japanese is voluminous. In English, see Dietrich, "Cotton manufacture and trade;" Wiens, "Cotton textile production;" and Mark Elvin, "Market towns and waterways: The county of Shanghai from 1480 to 1910." In *The city in late Imperial China*, ed. Skinner, pp. 441–73.

As a proud native of the coastal region of southern Fukien Province wrote in the early seventeenth century,

During the reign of Emperor Mu-tsung [r. 1567–72], the laws restricting trade with foreigners were abolished.¹¹⁵ Therefore, merchants from all over the country have flocked to the [southeastern] coast where they have constructed sailing vessels and dispersed over the Eastern and Western maritime trade routes¹¹⁶ . . . The money they trade amounts to several hundred thousand [*liang*¹¹⁷] of silver annually. Public and private have become mutually dependent, and [the southeastern coast?] has become the Emperor's Southern Treasury.¹¹⁸

In 1639, yet another native of coastal Fukien outlined his reasons for supporting China's continued involvement in maritime trade: 1) silk and silk textiles from China often sold for double the domestic price in the Philippines and Southeast Asia;¹¹⁹ 2) porcelain and other Chinese products also were highly prized overseas; and 3) large numbers of unemployed artisans from China had found work in the Philippines. This writer went on to explain that the Spanish did not attempt to barter for goods and services, but rather paid for them with "silver coins" (*yin ch'ien*).¹²⁰ Left unsaid was his belief that, when those coins were imported into China, they had had a positive impact on the Ming economy in general and the economy of Fukien in particular.

115 Restrictions on trading with Japan remained in effect, although they were frequently and perhaps routinely ignored by Chinese traders. See Kobata, *Kingin bōekishi*, pp. 284 ff.; and Boxer, *The great ship from Amacon*, pp. 30–31.

116 "The eastern route led to Luzon, the Sulu Islands, and the Moluccas, while the western trade route reached, via the Indo-Chinese coast and the Malay peninsula, as far as Sunda Kalapa, later known as Jakarta on the coast of western Java." See Blussé, *Strange company*, p. 104.

117 One *liang* was equal to approximately 0.0375 kilograms in weight.

118 Chou Ch'i-yüan, "Hsü," in Chang Hsieh, *Tung Hsi Yang k'ao* (Peking, 1981), p. 17. For slightly different translations of this same passage, see Cheng K'o-ch'eng, "Cheng Ch'eng-kung's maritime expansion and early Ch'ing coastal prohibition." In *Development and decline of Fukien Province*, ed. Vermeer, p. 225; and Lin, "Fukien's Private Sea Trade," pp. 197–98. For a detailed study of late Ming Chang-chou in English, see Rawski, *Agricultural Change*, pp. 57–100. See also Chang, "Maritime trade and local economy," pp. 63–81. Shiba's research on the Ningpo region of Chekiang Province during this period reveals similar developments: "[When] restrictions on overseas trade were lifted in 1567, silver from Japan, Portugal, and Spain poured into inland China via Ningpo." See Shiba Yoshinobu, "Ningpo and Its Hinterland." In *The city in late imperial China*, ed. Skinner, p. 399.

119 This writer was undoubtedly aware that Chinese silks also had found a ready market in early seventeenth-century Japan. Because trade with Japan was still illegal in China, however, he probably did not want to bring this point to the attention of the Ming court.

120 Ku Yen-wu, ed., *T'ien-hsiachün-kuo li-pingshu* (Taipei, 1979), pp. 6753–754. I am grateful to Professor Lung-chang Young for bringing this passage to my attention. Professor Young and Dr Pin-tsun Chang discuss the passage in unpublished manuscripts which they have very kindly permitted me to read.

Although foreign silver brought China certain benefits, it also created some problems. For example, not only did bullion imports fail to solve completely the Ming dynasty's chronic shortage of precious metals,¹²¹ but during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries these imports also contributed to very rapid urban growth, to unbridled business speculation, and, in certain parts of the country at least, to significant price inflation.¹²² The economic instability that ensued was exacerbated by the fact that during this period some Chinese merchants and producers came to rely too heavily on the continued expansion of the money economy. Because of the depressed state of the domestic mining industry, however, and because of the problems that continued to plague the production of copper coins in China, the money economy itself came to depend to a very large extent on imports of silver to increase the money supply at a pace that would maintain business and consumer confidence.

During much of the Wan-li reign (1573–1620) this dependence posed no real problems as Japanese and New World mines continued to produce large amounts of silver, a substantial portion of which was used to purchase Chinese goods. During the T'ien-ch'i (1621–27) and Ch'ung-chen (1628–44) reigns, however, economic and political circumstances in various parts

121 Indeed, as Willard J. Peterson and Ray Huang have pointed out, the great size of the Ming economy and population meant that, as large as those imports were, they were not able to end the dynasty's chronic shortage of monetary metals. See Peterson, *Bitter gourd*, pp. 68–70; and Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, pp. 79–80. Nevertheless, silver imports were substantial enough to cause certain regions of the country to give up other forms of currency entirely and use only silver as a medium of exchange. When the Spanish Augustinian, Martin da Rada (1533–78), visited southern Fukien in 1575, for example, he “did not see any kind of money save only in [Ch’üan-chou] and its appendages, where there was a stamped copper money with a hole bored through the middle of it . . . Everywhere else (and also there) everything is bought by weight with little bits of silver . . .” Martin da Rada quoted in C. R. Boxer, ed., *South China in the Sixteenth Century* (Nendeln, Liechtenstein, 1967), p. 294. Had Father da Rada returned to Fukien just a few years later, he may well have seen Spanish *pesos* minted in Mexico and Peru in circulation there. See Chuang Wei-chi, “Fu-chien Nan-an ch’u-t’u wai-kuo yin-pi ti chi-ko wen-t’i,” *K’ao-ku*, 6 (1975), pp. 352–55; Chuang Wei-chi, “Fu-chien Ch’üan-chou ti-ch’ü ch’u-t’u wu p’i wai-kuo yin-pi,” *K’ao-ku*, 6 (1975), pp. 373–79; and Ng, “A study of the peasant society of South Fukien,” p. 209.

122 Because China as a whole remained undermonetized during late Ming times, the country does not seem to have experienced the dramatic price inflation that affected certain parts of Europe, the New World, and the Middle East during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Nevertheless, in areas where foreign silver circulated relatively freely such as the southeastern coast, the Yangtze delta, and the Grand Canal corridor, there is evidence of significant price inflation at certain times during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. See Rawski, *Agricultural change and the peasant economy of South China*, p. 25; Albert Chan, “The decline and fall of the Ming dynasty, A study of internal factors” (Diss., Harvard University, 1953), pp. 97–98, 116–17; James Geiss, “Peking under the Ming, 1368–1644” (Diss., Princeton University, 1979), pp. 144 ff; Peterson, *Bitter gourd*, pp. 70–73.

of the world changed in ways that were to have a significant impact on the Chinese economy. Of particular importance to the Ming monetary system was the fact that Sino-Spanish trade in Manila experienced several periods of severe disruption during the first half of the seventeenth century. Some of this disruption was caused by Dutch and English harassment of Spanish, Portuguese, and Chinese shipping in the South China Sea, but a much more important factor was probably the sharp decline that occurred in New World bullion production at this time. For example, silver output at Potosí in Peru fell rapidly in the early seventeenth century (see Table 8.4) and, by the 1630s, a shortage of mercury was contributing to a steep decline in Mexican silver production as well. Potosí never fully recovered from its seventeenth-century slump and silver production in Mexico did not improve significantly until the 1660s, long after the Ming dynasty had fallen.¹²³

During the 1630s, China's economic and monetary situation got even worse when Philip IV of Spain tried to reduce the corruption associated with the trade in Chinese and other Asian goods between the New World and the Philippines. In the early 1630s, Philip placed new restrictions on commerce between Peru and Mexico,¹²⁴ and in 1635 he sent a special inspector to oversee the collection of customs duties in Acapulco. When two of the so-called "Great Ships from China" (*naos de la China*) arrived there in 1636, this inspector valued a cargo of silks and porcelains said to be worth 800,000 *pesos* (23,000 kilograms of silver) at an almost incredible 4 million *pesos* (115,000 kilograms of silver).¹²⁵ Since this far exceeded the legal limit for Asian imports into Acapulco, the inspector then refused to let the goods be sold until the people responsible for the attempted deception had paid a huge fine. This policy remained in force for several years with severe consequences for Manila, Acapulco, and, because of the duties lost to the Spanish treasury, even Madrid. As the Spanish king admitted several years later,

It must be noted that three-fourths of the merchandise which the citizens [of Manila] are accustomed to trade is pledged to the [Chinese], since the commerce has hitherto been sustained on credit alone; and as in . . . 1636–37 no money went from [New Spain] from the goods which the citizens [of Manila] sent [in 1636], which the [Chinese] had sold on credit, they have not been able to satisfy these

123 Bakewell, "Mining in colonial Spanish America," pp. 120, 144–45.

124 As Woodrow Borah has convincingly demonstrated, a major item in this commerce was Chinese silk, which was shipped from the Philippines to Peru *via* Acapulco. See Borah, *Early colonial trade*, pp. 122–25.

125 Juan Grau y Monfalcon, quoted in Antonio Alvarez de Abreu, "Commerce between the Philippines and Nueva España." In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 30, eds. Blair and Robertson, pp. 69–70.

claims. For this reason the [Chinese] have gone away, and say that they are not willing to lose more than what they have lost . . .¹²⁶

Perhaps not surprisingly, Sino-Spanish trade in the Philippines, which had already declined substantially from the record levels of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, declined even further; in 1637, only one small vessel sailed from Manila to Acapulco with little of value aboard.¹²⁷ The situation improved somewhat in 1638 as the Chinese returned to the market and two galleons, including one of the largest ever built in the Philippines, departed the islands for Mexico. Unfortunately for those involved in Sino-Spanish trade, the larger vessel was wrecked on the way to Acapulco with the loss of its entire cargo and many of its crew.¹²⁸ Since by all accounts there was very little silver available in Manila in 1638, it is likely that the Chinese had once again sold their goods on credit and thus had suffered their second economic disaster in three years. More bad news was to come. In August 1639, two Manila-bound galleons were wrecked with losses said to have been in excess of 500,000 *pesos*.¹²⁹ From an annual total of well over 2 million *pesos* (57,500 kilograms of silver) as late as 1632, therefore, the late 1630s saw the flow of bullion from the New World to the Philippines and thus to China reduced to a mere trickle.

By late 1639, the economic situation in Manila was desperate, and when the colonial government there imposed new taxes to make up for its operating shortfall, tensions between the European and Chinese communities exploded. Between November 1639 and March 1640, the better-armed Spanish are said to have killed more than 20,000 Chinese throughout the Philippines.¹³⁰ Not surprisingly, this development led to a severe disruption of Sino-Spanish trade in 1640–41.¹³¹ Although there was apparently some improvement in 1642–43, this may have been offset by the fact that the Portuguese in Macao broke off commercial relations with Manila in 1642 when they learned of Portugal's rebellion against Spain in Europe. Since the Macao–Manila trade alone is known to have been worth 1,500,000 *pesos* (43,125 kilograms of sil-

126 Quoted in *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 30, eds. Blair and Robertson, p. 86.

127 Schurz, *The Manila galleon*, pp. 188, 194; "Letter to Felipe IV from the Treasurer at Manila, August 31, 1638." In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 29, eds. Blair and Robertson p. 58.

128 Schurz, *The Manila galleon*, p. 259; "Events in the Philipinas, 1638–39." In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 29, eds. Blair and Robertson, pp. 168–71. This wreck has now been found and excavated. See the account in Mathers, "Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion."

129 "Events in the Filipinas Islands, August 1639–August 1640." In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 29, eds. Blair and Robertson, pp. 194–96.

130 "Relation of the insurrection of the Chinese." In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 29, eds. Blair and Robertson, pp. 208–58.

131 See, for example, the shipping figures for 1640–41 in Chaunu, *Les Philippines*, pp. 157, 159.

ver) in some years during the 1630s, the economic consequences for both sides and for China were considerable.¹³²

As John E. Wills, Jr., has discussed elsewhere in this volume, this was not the first time that European politics had affected the economy of Macao during the seventeenth century. The Dutch had harassed Iberian shipping since they arrived in Asian waters in 1600 and, during the mid-1630s, they began protracted blockades of the Portuguese colonies in both Melaka (Malacca) and Goa.¹³³ Melaka fell to the Dutch in 1641, a development that made it even more difficult for the Portuguese to import European and South Asian silver into Macao. Given the greatly reduced shipments of silver from the New World to Europe during the 1630s and 1640s (see Table 8.5), however, it is likely that this route was already far less important to the economy of Macao and China than it had been even two or three decades earlier.

Moreover, between about 1635 and 1638 the economic effects of these Dutch actions were eased for Macao by a sudden upturn in the volume and profitability of the trade between the colony and Japan. The immediate cause of this upturn was the decision of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1635 to prohibit Japanese nationals and Japanese ships from trading overseas. Although the total amount of silver exported from Japan appears to have declined after this time,¹³⁴ therefore, the business of the Dutch, the Chinese, and particularly the Portuguese improved as Japanese merchants in Kyoto, Osaka, and Nagasaki scrambled to find alternative sources of supply for their commercial needs. In 1637, for example, more than 2 million *liang* (75,000 kilograms) of silver left Nagasaki for Macao on Portuguese vessels, while, in 1638, the figure was well over 1 million *liang*.¹³⁵ Dutch and Chinese merchants traded successfully in Japan during this period as well and, in 1637–38, their combined exports of silver may have approached or even exceeded the totals carried by the Portuguese.¹³⁶ A new day in East Asian economic and political history was about to dawn, however. In 1637, deteriorating economic conditions in southwestern Japan had precipitated the so-called Shimabara Rebellion in which perhaps 20,000 Japanese Catholics and their allies rose up to oppose the policies of local leaders and the Tokugawa

132 Boxer, *The great ship from Amacon*, p. 135, n. 284; and Schurz, *The Manila galleon*, p. 132.

133 C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne empire, 1600–1800* (New York, 1965), pp. 25–26.

134 For a different interpretation of seventeenth-century Japanese trade figures which sees silver exports from the country declining at a later date, see Robert Leroy Innes, “The door ajar: Japan’s foreign trade in the seventeenth century” (Diss., University of Michigan, 1980), pp. 376–432.

135 Boxer, *The great ship from Amacon*, pp. 145–48.

136 I base this statement on the somewhat contradictory information contained in Iwao, *Shuinsenbōekiishi*, p. 327; Iwao Seiichi, “Kinsei Nishshi bōeki ni kansuru sūryōteki kōsatsu,” *Shigaku zasshi*, 62, No. 11 (Nov. 1953), p. 991; Katō, “The Japanese-Dutch Trade,” p. 66; and Oskar Nachod, *Die Beziehungen der Niederländischen Ostindischen Kompagnie zu Japan im Siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1897), Beilage 63, pp. ccvii–ccviii.

Shogunate. When the “Christian Rebellion” was finally crushed in 1638, the Tokugawa authorities decided to prohibit all further contact with the Portuguese, who were accused of supporting the rebels and plotting the conquest of Japan. Although they were carrying silk and other goods already paid for by Japanese merchants, therefore, the Portuguese vessels that arrived in Nagasaki in 1639 were not permitted to discharge their cargoes. Indeed, the Portuguese would not be allowed to trade in Japan again until the nineteenth century.

Dutch and Chinese merchants moved quickly to capitalize on this situation, but it is unlikely the silver they exported from Japan ever reached the combined Portuguese-Dutch-Chinese total of 1637; by 1642–43 Japanese silver exports had apparently dropped to below 1,500,000 *liang* (56,250 kilograms) annually.¹³⁷ Whatever the exact figure, it was far below Kobata Atsushi’s estimate of four to five million *liang* (150,000–187,500 kilograms) per year when Sino-Japanese trade was at its peak in the early seventeenth century. Moreover, when this decline is considered in light of the depressed commercial situation in Manila, the reduction in bullion shipments from the New World to Europe (see Table 8.5), and the disruption caused by the Dutch blockades of Goa and Melaka, it is clear that far less silver was available for importation into China during the early 1640s than had been the case just a few years earlier.

Compounding the monetary problems caused by this decline in silver imports were further difficulties with China’s copper coinage. Faced with growing economic and military problems during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries,¹³⁸ the Ming government had attempted to improve its financial position by expanding its production of copper coins. New mints were established in many parts of the empire, but because they were both poorly managed and underfinanced, the quality of the coins produced was far below the government’s hopes and expectations. Moreover, as economic conditions worsened during the 1630s and early 1640s,¹³⁹ the country’s many counterfeiters, some of whom previously had worked in official mints or had other connection with the government,

137 Iwao, *Shuinsen bōeki*, p. 327; Nachod, *Die Beziehungen*, Beilage 63, p. ccviii. As in the case of the New World, a key factor in the decline of Japanese silver exports at this time appears to be a decline in domestic bullion production. For a brief discussion of this topic with bibliography, see Atwell, “Some observations on the ‘seventeenth-century crisis’ in China and Japan,” pp. 231–32.

138 On those problems, see *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, eds. Mote and Twitchett, pp. 557–84.

139 Although it is outside the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that many of China’s economic problems at this time were intimately connected to the adverse impact of climatic change on the agricultural sector. For preliminary discussions of this subject, see Atwell, “Some observations on the ‘seventeenth-century crisis’ in China and Japan,” pp. 224–27; and Atwell, “A seventeenth-century ‘general crisis’ in East Asia?,” pp. 671–74.

TABLE 8.8

Value of 1,000 copper coins in Southeastern China, 1638–46

Date	Kilograms of silver
1638	0.03375(+)
1640	0.01875(+)
1643	0.012375
1646	0.0063

(+) indicates that the figure given for this year in the original source is imprecise and is likely to have been slightly larger than that which appears in the table.

Source: Yeh Shao-yuan, "Chi'i-chen chi-wen lu," in *T'ung-shih* (Shanghai, 1911), *ts'c* 18, 2/6a; Chang Lü-hsiang, "T'ung-hsiang tsai-i chi," in Ch'en Heng-li, ed., *Pu Nung-shu yen-chiu* (Peking, 1958), p. 325.

stepped up their activities and flooded the market with low quality coins.¹⁴⁰ As the figures in Table 8.8 suggest, those coins and declining bullion imports helped to drive silver from the market in the economically advanced southeast of China.

This abrupt reversal in the long-term trend towards cheaper silver discussed earlier in this section is important for several reasons. First, as Frank C. Spooner pointed out more than two decades ago, the reversal was an international phenomenon that affected Spain, France, Germany, Holland, and many other parts of Europe during the mid-seventeenth century. As in China, the worst period of monetary instability in Spain came in the early 1640s when declining bullion imports (see Table 8.5), the counterfeiting of copper coins, and currency manipulation by the government caused "an astonishing increase" in the value of silver *vis-à-vis* copper.¹⁴¹ The same was generally true of Japan, where declining silver production and changes in government monetary policy caused the silver-copper exchange rate to widen sharply between 1638 and 1647.¹⁴² Although much more work on this seventeenth-century "shift" from silver to copper remains to be done, Spooner believes that it was of fundamental importance to the early modern world economy: "After the easy conditions promoted by the [sixteenth-century] affluence of silver, the seventeenth century did not offer the same advantages . . . [I]n the seventeenth century there was debility, troubled by copper, when everything seemed to relinquish something of the earlier vigor and richness of life."¹⁴³

140 P'eng, *Chung-kuo huo-pi shih*, pp. 690–93; and Chan, *The glory and fall of the Ming dynasty*, pp. 285–87.

141 Spooner, *The international economy and monetary movements*, p. 50.

142 Kimiki and Yamamura, "Silver mines and Sung coins," p. 355.

143 Spooner, *The international economy and monetary movements*, p. 86.

In China during the 1640s, perhaps nowhere was this decline in “vigor and richness of life” more visible than that in the once thriving city of Soochow. As a native of the city wrote early in 1642:

In the streets there are numerous beggars, very thin and worn. Moreover, since the new year, it has been cold and it has rained frequently. The spring has nearly come to an end, but the cold still persists. After the full moon of the second month, it rained continuously for over ten days. The people are dying in great numbers through lack of food. I have seen with my own eyes several tens of [starved] corpses being buried daily in the property of the prince. When the price of rice rises to over ninety coins a pint, what wonder if they have nothing to eat! Most of the residences in the city are empty and they are falling into ruins. Fertile farms and beautiful estates are for sale but there is no one to buy them. Formerly the city of [Soochow] was prosperous and its people tended to be extravagant. It is natural that after a period of prosperity a period of depression should follow; but I never dreamed that I should have to witness these misfortunes in the days of my life.¹⁴⁴

As this passage and research by Helen Dunstan, Angela Leung, and others make clear, not all of Soochow's problems during these years were monetary in origin or nature. Indeed, during the late 1630s and particularly the early 1640s, a series of floods, droughts, and locust attacks sharply reduced grain yields in southeastern China, helping to cause serious food shortages in some areas.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it is also clear that other factors were helping to create these “food shortages” as well. For example, the dramatic growth in China's textile industry during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had radically transformed the nature of agriculture in the lower Yangtze region. As the cultivation of cotton and mulberry expanded to meet increased domestic and international demand, an area that once had been self-sufficient in food now found itself dependent upon interregional trade for much of its grain supply. Even in years when the local rice crop was good, therefore, the people of Nan-Chihli, northern Chekiang, and other areas needed to sell their mulberry leaves, silkworms, raw silk, raw cotton, cotton yarn, and cotton cloth in order to buy additional grain, pay their taxes and rents, and repay loans from the moneylenders in nearby towns. If they were unable to do so, or if the prices they received for their cash crops fluctuated too wildly, disaster could ensue, especially when local grain stocks were low. That the latter situation existed in the Yangtze region in the early 1640s is clear from the following

¹⁴⁴ Yeh, “Ch'i-chen chi-wen lu,” 2/10b, quoted in Chan, *The glory and fall*, pp. 235–36.

¹⁴⁵ Helen Dunstan, “The late Ming epidemics: A preliminary survey,” *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i*, 3, No. 3 (December 1975), pp. 1–59; Angela Li Che Leung, “Organized medicine in Ming-Qing China: State and private medical institutions in the Lower Yangtze region,” *Late Imperial China*, 8, No. 1 (June 1987), pp. 135–66; Atwell, “A seventeenth-century ‘general crisis’ in East Asia?”, pp. 671–74.

account from Hu-chou in northern Chekiang, where 30 percent of the population is said to have died from “famine” and disease between 1640 and 1642:

Today sericulture is the basis of livelihood for the people of Hu-chou. How could it be expected that in [1641] . . . mulberry leaves would be scarce and valuable while raw silk was practically worthless. Then in [1642] the price of raw silk improved a little, but mulberry leaves were extremely cheap and the second crop of silkworms was a total loss. The remainder of the first crop of mulberry leaves on the ground together with the newly sprouted second crop brought only half the usual return . . . How can the affairs of men be so uneven for the people of Hu-chou to be this unfortunate?¹⁴⁶

Similar problems existed in the cotton-producing areas of Sung-chiang Prefecture nearby. Between 1642 and 1644, for example, the silver price of cotton and cotton textiles in Sung-chiang plummeted while the silver price of grain rose by more than 200 percent.¹⁴⁷

These dramatic price changes can be explained in several ways. First, as was noted earlier, during the late 1630s and early 1640s, natural disasters and widespread military operations reduced grain yields and drove up food prices in many parts of China. However, it should also be remembered that, over the course of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, virtually every stage of the textile trade in China had come to involve the exchange of silver. Given the dramatic decline in silver imports discussed above, the higher rates of taxation imposed by the Ming government, and the probability of increased hoarding of precious metals, there is reason to suspect that, by the early 1640s, the amount of silver in circulation in the economically advanced regions of China had been substantially reduced from earlier levels. The figures in Table 8.8 tend to confirm that suspicion, as does the fact that plummeting tax receipts caused the Ming court to consider both the reintroduction of paper currency and the expansion of government mining operations with western technical assistance.¹⁴⁸ These plans proved impossible to implement, however, and when rebel forces overran Peking in April 1644, they found the treasuries there virtually empty.

The overall impact of international trade and monetary fluctuations on the fall of the Ming dynasty remains a subject of considerable debate.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the importance of maritime trade and silver imports for certain

146 Mr. Shen, “Ch’i-huang chi-shih.” In *Pu Nung-shu yen-chiu*, ed. Ch’en Heng-li (Peking, 1958), p. 290.

147 Wiens, “Cotton textile production,” p. 325. See also P’eng, *Chung-kuo huo-pi shih*, p. 713.

148 Chi Liu-chi, *Ming-chi pei-lieh*, 4 vols. (Taipei, 1969), Vol. 3, pp. 337–38; Yang, *Money and credit*, pp. 67–68; Peterson, *Bitter gourd*, pp. 74–76; Pan Jixing, “The spread of Georgius Agricola’s *De Re Metallica* in late Ming China,” *T’oung Pao*, 77 (1991), pp. 108–18.

149 See, for example, Goldstone, “East and West;” and Chapter 9 by Martin Heijdra, in this volume.

regions of China and certain sectors of the late Ming economy should not be underestimated.¹⁵⁰ As a knowledgeable observer in Kwangtung province wrote in the summer of 1647,

During the Chia-ching reign [1522–66] . . . [the Portuguese] gradually penetrated the borders of China as far as Macao, where they built a permanent settlement . . . [and] were allowed to trade every year in Canton . . . [As a result] both Chinese and foreign goods circulated freely in Kwangtung . . .

Subsequently, official corruption . . . increased to the point that the Portuguese were driven to commit violent acts . . . Afterwards, they were no longer permitted to go to Canton . . . [and] Chinese merchants were obliged to take their goods to Macao to trade. This occurred in [1640].

Since then merchants have experienced repeated difficulties, goods have not circulated, and trade [in Kwangtung] has come to a [virtual] halt . . . It is therefore clear that when the people of Macao come to trade, Kwangtung prospers; when they do not come, Kwangtung suffers.¹⁵¹

Students of the work of C. R. Boxer will be aware that what “the people of Macao” (the Portuguese and their Chinese agents) took to Canton before 1640 was almost entirely Japanese and Spanish-American silver. The same was true of many of the maritime traders who frequented the ports of Fukien and Chekiang provinces during these years as well. With a combined population of more than twenty million people and close commercial ties to Nan Chihli, Kiangsi, and other advanced regions of China, the provinces of Kwangtung, Fukien, and Chekiang hardly played an insignificant role in the late Ming economy.

Further evidence of the importance of maritime trade to that economy can be found in certain political developments during the early Ch’ing dynasty (c. 1644–83). Although resistance to the Ch’ing conquest continued into the early 1680s, there is evidence to suggest that by the late 1640s the Chinese economy was already beginning to recover from some of the disasters discussed above. Not only did grain and commodity prices return to something approaching normal during the late 1640s and early 1650s, but even maritime trade appears to have made a significant comeback. As one Ch’ing dynasty official later commented, “I still remember the years around 1649 and 1650. At that time . . . foreign goods were in all the markets and commercial transactions among the people were often carried out with foreign silver coins. Because of

150 The following draws heavily on Atwell, “A seventeenth-century ‘general crisis’ in East Asia?,” pp. 677–80.

151 T’ung Yang-chia quoted in *Wen-hsien ts’ung-pien* (Peking, 1930–?), *chi* Vol. 24, p. 19b. See also Fu Lo-shu, *A documentary chronicle of Sino-Western relations* (Tucson, 1966), Vol. 2, p. 7.

this, [those coins] circulated in all the provinces and were found everywhere."¹⁵²

This situation did not last, for during the late 1650s and early 1660s the Ch'ing authorities forcibly evacuated thousands of towns and villages along the southeastern coast in an attempt to eliminate the maritime trade upon which enemies of the new regime had built a prosperous commercial empire. Although the evacuation policy was successful, it had a high economic cost. As the above quotation indicates, during the late 1640s and 1650s seaborne trade had once again brought substantial quantities of silver to the coastal regions of China. As in late Ming times, much of that silver then filtered into the interior of China where it helped to stimulate and sustain economic activity. However, as soon as the Ch'ing dynasty's prohibitions on maritime trade were implemented in the late 1650s, "[foreign] silver coins disappeared completely [from circulation]. This is clear proof that the source of wealth has been stopped up."¹⁵³

It clearly is an exaggeration to suggest that maritime trade was the "source of wealth" for late Ming and early Ch'ing China. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, domestic demand for imported silver and foreign demand for Chinese silks, porcelains, gold, copper coins, and other goods helped to involve China more deeply in world economic affairs than ever before. That involvement proved to be a mixed blessing, but its importance for the study of late imperial China should not be underestimated. As one specialist on the period has put it,

By 1644 China is a part of world history, deeply affected by the movement of silver in the world's trade, by the dissemination of crops and foodstuffs which would transform its agriculture, and by weapons and warfare, plagues and products which bore in on the daily life of the Chinese people. In the consciousness of peoples, whether Chinese, Europeans, or others, the national entities of Eurasia remained worlds apart and would do so until very recent times. Yet in many ways . . . the civilizations and national entities of Eurasia were becoming mutually responsive.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Mu T'ien-yen, "Ch'ing k'ai hai-chin shu." In *Huang Ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien*, ed. Ho Ch'ang-ling (Taipei, n.d.), ch. 26/14b, p. 966. See also Ch'üan Han-sheng, *Chung-kuo ching-chi shih lun-ts'ung*, Vol. 2, p. 514.

¹⁵³ Mu, "Ch'ing k'ai hai-chin shu," ch. 26/14b, p. 966. See also Ch'üan Han-sheng, *Chung-kuo ching-chi shih lun-ts'ung*, Vol. 2, p. 514; Kishimoto Mio, "The Kangxi depression and early Qing local markets," *Modern China*, 10, No. 2 (1984), pp. 227-56; and Hans Ulrich Vogel, "Chinese central monetary policy, 1644-1800," *Late Imperial China*, 8, No. 2 (December 1987), pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁴ F. W. Mote, "Yüan and Ming." In *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and historical perspectives*, ed. K. C. Chang (New Haven and London, 1977), p. 195.

CHAPTER 9

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL CHINA DURING THE MING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the general socio-economic development of rural China during the Ming period. Because I use the term “socio-economic” in its precise meaning, I treat only the most salient aspects of social and economic developments insofar as they *interact* in the countryside. This chapter examines the ways in which economic factors were reflected in, and sometimes contributed to, the changes in social groupings and organizations during the Ming dynasty. Conversely, the ways in which social factors were reflected in, and sometimes contributed to, economic development are also examined.

The taxation and corvée structure is portrayed in some detail. The social and institutional foundation of the *li-chia* system is discussed for two reasons: first, it offers a window through which we can come to understand some idiosyncratic features of the Ming socio-economic landscape; and second, it was in and of itself a significant cause of change. The possibilities for tax and corvée evasion or exemption were a major force behind social and economic developments during Ming times, as was the government’s chronic inability to keep land and population records up to date. This shortcoming was recognized by officials at many levels of the government, and Ming officials implemented many reforms aimed at redistributing tax and corvée levies more equally and at facilitating tax collection. As a result of these changes, although the *li-chia* structure continued to exist well into the Ch’ing dynasty, by the early seventeenth century in many areas it was radically different in content from the institution envisioned by Chu Yüan-chang, the first Ming emperor.

THE MACRO-ECONOMIC SETTING

Introduction: regional divisions

For many purposes of historical analysis, the provincial administrative units and their often more ancient prefectural and county sub-units are the most useful subdivisions of China: traditional administrative data were compiled

and summarized for preservation at those levels and reflected, in many instances, province-wide implementation of specific policies. In addition, the emerging strata of the local degree holders of Ming and Ch'ing times, who were themselves a product of examinations that were hierarchically organized according to this administrative structure, increasingly formed both cultural and political lobby groups affiliated along the lines of these administrative units. The more elaborate system of "macro-regions" subdivided into economic and social "cores" and "peripheries" that has been advanced by G. William Skinner has also been utilized by some scholars for certain types of historical analysis.¹ Although Skinner's formulations for the Ch'ing have been used for times as early as the Sung (960–1279), this approach is anachronistic in many ways. At their best, the macro-regions are defined formally by integrated economic networks and by the hierarchies of services that were available at central locations within them. The bases for considering that there were such economic regions, however, formed only gradually during the latter half of the Ming. In their worst use, these macro-regions, as means of analysis, are wrongly taken to be homogeneous regions that possess certain characteristics, not only economic ones, which are inferred to be present throughout the region as a whole. The development of economic networks, their boundaries, degrees of integration, and densities of local penetration, as well as the social and material bases for their existence, are all important topics for Chinese history. But questions concerning these topics cannot be solved by a facile reference to a macro-regional map. For one thing, the macro-regions as Skinner defined them and which are widely reproduced were not necessarily arrived at inductively from economic data, but were, in some cases, based upon arbitrarily delineated river systems.² Population density, market penetration, and land productivity are important factors in any social and economic analysis. They should be viewed as absolute variables and should not be treated as items that are merely secondary or subordinate to arbitrary constructs such as "core" and "periphery" in which they are relativized within macroregional boundaries.³

1 See G. William Skinner, ed., *The city in late imperial China* (Stanford, 1977), and his "Presidential address: the structure of Chinese history," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 44, No. 2 (February, 1983), pp. 271–92.

2 Trade between different macro-regions along the Yangtze and the Grand Canal during the Ming dynasty could have dwarfed any internal trade within them, sharply contradicting the macro-regional hypothesis according to which, trade within macro-regions is paramount. Such long-distance trade on a national scale might very well have preceded and caused the development of economic networks that would develop into something akin to macro-regions.

3 Population density and land productivity are higher in the peripheral counties of some macro-regions than in the core of others, if we follow the macro-regions commonly used at present. For some mostly commercial purposes, the structural distance to the central nodes of a network is of great importance,

Footnote continued on next page

More importantly, for many social, political, and cultural purposes other geographic or social divisions make more sense: dialect areas might better reflect the actual social and cultural networks of larger groups than merchants.⁴ In other cases, more objectively determined typological divisions based on particular geographic, climatic, or demographic criteria might be required.⁵ In most cases, any serious explanation of social or economic phenomena requires the combination of many such factors. But no arbitrary definition, “core” or “periphery,” of regional units suits all purposes. Here we shall adopt a simpler grouping of provinces forming geographic regions, based very loosely on topography, climate, and the nature of agricultural production and social organization. They are not to be taken as absolute identities or networks.

North China, if we restrict our considerations to China proper, is characterized by its partly animal-driven wheat and millet agriculture and, as we will argue following various authors, a resulting social structure with more managerial landlords and share-cropping peasants than elsewhere. Especially on the plain, the population was distributed among relatively compact large villages linked by land roads in less than optimal ways. Conditions during the Yüan (1271–1368) period itself, or the Yüan-Ming transition (it is not clear which), had resulted in a great loss or displacement of the population; but the centuries-old legacy of numerous small and densely distributed counties created opportunities for more penetrating government control and assistance than elsewhere. Along the Grand Canal a number of important trade cities arose, second only to those of Chiang-nan. The large consuming army communities along the border only were of primary importance during the first part of the Ming.

Chiang-nan, here used as a loose term incorporating southern Kiangsu and Anhwei (the Ming Southern Metropolitan Region, Nan Chih-li or simply Nan-ching), as well as Chekiang, had, since the Sung period, become the economic center of China: newer rice strains having created enough surplus production to support many hamlets and vibrant cities linked to the outside

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and the concepts of “core” and “periphery” may be useful in those particular cases. In other instances, however, as in the analysis of tenancy, or other rural economic characteristics, absolute figures of population pressure and surplus production may be much more important, and one should realize that the core areas used at present are *not* directly equivalent to the most densely populated areas.

4 See Chou Chen-ho and Yu Ju-chieh, *Fang-yen yü Chung-kuo wen-hua*, Chung-kuo wen-hua-shih ts'ung-shu (Shang-hai, 1986), who posit an even a better fit of dialect areas with political rather than with economic divisions in those cases where prefectural boundaries have remained stable since the Sung.

5 See the studies of Chin Ch'i-ming. For example, Chin Ch'i-ming, *Chung-kuo nung-ts'ün chü-lo ti-li* (Nanching, 1989); his “Nung-ts'ün chü-lo ti-li.” In *Jen-wen ti-li-hsiieh lun-ts'ung*, ed. Li Hsü-tan (Pei-ching, 1985), pp. 126–43, and his “Chung-kuo nung-ts'ün chü-lo ti hsing-t'ai yü kuei-mo.” In *Chung-Mei jen-wen ti-li-hsiieh yen-chiu t'ao-lun-hui wen-chi* (Proceedings of the Sino-American symposium on human geography), eds. Guo Laixi, Robert Hoffpauir, and Elliot McIntire (Pei-ching, 1988), pp. 54–61.

through trade by way of ubiquitous waterways. A subsequent move to more profitable crops and handicrafts was made possible by the reliance on food imports from elsewhere, especially from along the Yangtze River (in Ming times, commonly called “the great river,” *Ta chiang*). Where rice was still cultivated, tenancy rather than direct sharecropping was relied upon by the well-to-do, who invested their wealth in other directions, notably culture, politics, and education. The many degree holders inserted themselves between the state and the direct cultivators, relying on the protection afforded by contacts in the government; the more so, as it was believed, justifiably or not, that there was an anti-Chiang-nan spirit within the Ming ruling house. The region around Su-chou can be considered as the area best exemplifying these characteristics. One subregion, Hui-chou, can only be considered part of Chiang-nan if we take a purely geographical approach; it is basically unique in many aspects owing to its empire-wide network of merchants, the enduring legacy of its most famous philosopher Chu Hsi, and, last but not least, the amount of economic data left by its mercantile elite.

Kiangsi and Hu-kuang were rice-producing, agriculturally rich areas linked through the Yangtze River and its tributaries. Where rivers were lacking, less development took place, but the regions near the Yangtze increasingly took part in the trade centered around the Chiang-nan region. Kiangsi had been more important nationally⁶ in the pre-Ming period than during the Ming; Ming overpopulation caused Kiangsi to export its people to Hu-kuang and beyond. Hu-kuang, encompassing the modern Hu-pei and Hunan provinces, replaced Kiangsi as the rice-basket of China centered on the Yangtze; present-day Han-k’ou (including the towns of Han-yang, and Chiang-hsia, the seat of Wu-ch’ang prefecture⁷) slowly taking over the position of the former political center Chiang-ling (or Ching-chou). Immigrants from other provinces could still improve themselves economically and socially there during most of the Ming, until population growth finally

6 I use the words “nation,” “nationally,” and “nationwide” rather loosely in this chapter, referring to China Proper as a whole rather than to any particular region. I do not mean to take sides in the debate as to whether China, during the Ming period, can be said to constitute a “nation” in the current political meaning of the term.

7 Place names in historical and contemporary China can be quite complicated. Any settlement can also have, in addition to its intrinsic name (perhaps complemented by some different older or literary versions), the names of the county, prefecture, or even province for which it is the seat. At the same time, such a name can belong to different settlements if the seat of a prefecture is different from the place after which the prefecture is named. Hu-kuang Wu-ch’ang during the Ming can therefore refer to both the Wu-ch’ang county seat (modern O-ch’eng city), as well as the Wu-ch’ang prefecture seat, which functioned concurrently as the seat of Chiang-hsia county (the modern Wu-ch’ang part of Wu-han). Also note that several different counties can have their seat in one and the same city: for example, Kuangchou during the Ming period was the seat of both Nan-hai and P’an-yü counties.

caught up and the first clashes between rice exporting landlords and the local populace took place in the late Ming.

Szechwan does not seem to have benefited at that time from the expanding food demand along the Yangtze; it seems to have remained largely self-contained. The great destruction of population and resources during the Ming-Ch'ing transition might skew our view. However, the fact that the level of economic development of eighteenth-century Szechwan resembles that of Hu-kuang two centuries earlier does not necessarily imply that it was also less economically advanced throughout the Ming.

Fukien (and similar areas to its north and south) gradually became quite economically developed, not on the basis of agriculture, but on the basis of national and international trade. The wealth earned by the town-based merchant elite was invested wherever it was advantageous. This investment could be, under certain conditions, in land, and the combination of "outside" money with the land shortage (Fukien is very mountainous) resulted in a relatively widespread and characteristic landowner system under which different people had invested in, and had rights to, different shares of the land and its products.

The Pearl River (Chu-chiang, during the Ming more commonly called Hsi-chiang) Delta in Kwangtung was not yet as integrated in the coastal trade during most of the Ming period. Expansion first took place by means of the gradual exploitation of the sandy coastal lands under strict guidance through the agency of veritable colonies. The legacy of a social landscape with, at times, antagonistic strong communal organizations was the result, culminating in sometimes fictitious "clans." Since the tax quota already had been decided in the early Ming when households were still few, the patriarchs of these clan organizations enjoyed much leeway with regard to tax payment. One whole clan often took the place of one household before the law. As a result, there was not much direct contact between an actual family and the state under this arrangement.

During the Ming, Yunnan and its adjacent provinces were still so much outside the national scene, and records consequently so scarce, that they will only be mentioned in special circumstances.

Climate

Many historians of our time have sought an ultimate cause of economic growth and decline, but socio-economic life is of such complexity that the search for single causes is likely to remain fruitless. Instead, one must attempt to investigate and link as many factors as possible, in the hope of being able to constitute one integrated general economic "conjuncture" that includes

such elements as prices, harvests, productivity, wages, interest rates, business turnover, and the money supply.⁸

In explaining short term and middle-range economic performance in pre-modern agrarian societies, the actual shape of the agricultural production curve indicating the sizes of actual harvests over the years being studied assumes the greatest importance. Agricultural production directly influenced the consumption and reproductive capacities of the producers themselves. The level of agricultural production, in conjunction with the population pressure on agricultural produce and natural resources, decided the prices of agricultural products. Depending upon the level and the type of market involvement of the various socio-economic strata of the population, these prices in turn affected the fortunes of those strata. Indirectly, harvests also decided most of the demand, both rural and urban, that was generated for manufactured products. Unlike the modern period, a crisis in the agricultural sector at that time also meant a crisis in the manufacturing sector: demand for artisans' products declined while the percentages of their income spent on food rose steeply.⁹ Several historians have shown that most short-term economic fluctuations were determined by the year-to-year variations in the harvest rather than long-term advances in productivity or money supplies.¹⁰

A study of climatic conditions is important in the context of an economic system in which harvest results are the central factor of economic life since the climate is one of the main variables that influence harvest conditions. Generalizations about the climate's effects, however, are hard to make, as a particular set of weather conditions affects each crop differently according to that crop's own requirements for growth. Indirectly, climate also influences other factors that have important effects on the economy or on society, such as the prevalence of micro-organisms that affect harvests and animal and human health, the state of transport conditions, or the availability of wind or water-generated power.¹¹

8 See, for example, the studies of Michel Morineau, "La conjoncture ou les cernes de la croissance," ch. 4 of "Paysannerie et croissance," eds. Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel, Michel Morineau. In *De 1450 à 1660*, Vol. 1, Part 2, eds. Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse, *Histoire économique et sociale de la France* (Paris, 1970–82), pp. 873–999; Michel Morineau, "Le flux, le stock et les norias." In *Incroyables gazettes et fabuleux métaux—les retours des trésors américains d'après les gazettes hollandaises (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles)*, Studies in modern capitalism/Études sur le capitalisme moderne, ed. Michel Morineau (1980; rpt. London and Paris, 1981), pp. 350–635.

9 For example, Miroslav Hroch and Josef Petrů, *Sedmnácté století—krize feudální společnosti?* (1976), trans. as *Das 17. Jahrhundert—Krise der Feudalgesellschaft*, tr. Eliška and Ralph Melville, Historische Perspektiven, 17 (Hamburg, 1981).

10 Especially as in Michel Morineau, "La conjoncture ou les cernes de la croissance."

11 See M. J. Ingram, G. Farmer, and T. M. L. Wigley, "Past climates and their impact on man: a review." In *Climate and history: studies in past climates and their impact on man*, eds. T. M. L. Wigley, et al. (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 3–25.

Climate is but one of the factors influencing economic activity. Most writers agree with authorities¹² who insist that, generally speaking, socio-economic systems can adapt in the long run to the range of variations in temperature and rainfall known to us throughout historic times, even if, in certain marginal cases, a small drop in average temperature or rainfall could just make the difference between subsistence and starvation.

Natural disasters are in some measure related to climate, but must be treated separately. A hypothesis has been offered suggesting that, in Europe, natural disasters, including epidemics, cost heavily in human life, but left the land intact, thereby raising the costs of labor and generating economic growth in the post-disaster phase. By contrast, it is said that characteristically in Asia both the land and the population suffered.¹³ Natural disasters in China generally were more destructive of capital, land, and equipment than of human life, thus causing no drastic reduction in labor supply. Hence, there was no great relief or economic upswing following a natural disaster there.

A final note about studies of the effects of climatic conditions on economies and societies is in order: far more sophisticated studies have been made of the history of Europe's climate than of China's. However, it is quite misleading to extrapolate probable Chinese conditions from the studies of Europe's climate changes. In general, little if any correlation is evident between the weather conditions at the two ends of the Eurasian continent. During the so-called "Little Ice Age" in the late sixteenth century, for example, Europe was abnormally wet, while the Chinese cold period was drier than usual.¹⁴

To account for the great differences between Chinese and European climatic changes, the eminent Chinese historian of climate, Chu K'o-chen (or Co-ching Chu, 1890–1974), has advanced the hypothesis that the cold center started in the Pacific about 1100, then moved to Europe where it lingered from 1300 to 1600 before moving back.¹⁵ Furthermore, abnormal conditions do not display uniformity across the extent of China, and it is the exact time

12 As, for example, J. L. Anderson, "History and climate: some economic models." In *Climate and history: studies in past climates and their impact on man*, eds. T. M. L. Wigley, et al. (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 337–55, or E. L. Jones, "Disasters and economic differentiation across Eurasia: a reply," *Journal of Economic History*, 45 (1985), pp. 675–82.

13 See E. L. Jones, "Disasters and economic differentiation across Eurasia: a reply."

14 It is worth noting that no direct relation can be demonstrated between abnormally cold weather and the fall of the dynasties in late Yüan and again in late Ming. In fact, the coldest period that can be found in later imperial times was during the early Ch'ing, not during the late Ming.

15 Chinese conditions show some agreement with those of Greenland, a fact that may have misled some scholars, for example, G. William Skinner, "Presidential address," or Frederic Wakeman Jr., *The great enterprise — the Manchu reconstruction of imperial order in seventeenth-century China* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 7, n. 7 to suppose a European-Chinese correspondence. For a worldwide overview, including some Chinese and Japanese data, see H. H. Lamb, *Climate, history, and the modern world* (London, 1982).

of their occurrence (e.g., *vis-à-vis* planting or harvesting times) during the year that is important.¹⁶

Theoretical problems regarding how the world's climatic system worked are compounded by the lack of data, as well as by the imprecision of the data we do have. It appears that rain gauges were distributed in the early Ming and that, in 1424, an edict was issued enjoining officials to submit reports on agricultural production, but we do not know whether the gauges were used, or whether the reports were actually submitted. In any case, no data from those measures are extant. The methods of phenology (a study of indirect measures as a means of determining climatic conditions, such as the dates of the flowering or ripening of flowers and plants) have been used to reconstruct a record of climatic changes indirectly in the attempt to overcome the lack of direct data. In China's case, records have been compiled from diaries that note when peaches, apricots, lilacs, and crab-apples blossomed.

Although epidemics quite regularly accompanied famines, which frequently accompanied droughts in the Ming, it is best to consider them separately. Epidemics are not caused by droughts, and their presence or absence can result in completely different magnitudes of deaths: the epidemic of 1586 caused more than 30,000 deaths in Lu-an of Anhwei province alone.¹⁷ Figures of that magnitude are rarely claimed for local famines where the suffering population had other options by which to deal with the famine, especially the option of temporary migration. Some historians have claimed great decreases in population from famine or epidemics in the 1640s, but closer examination shows that this calculation is based on tax-related evidence that must be assessed with great care and that is often hardly datable.¹⁸

16 A study by Zhang, Gong, and Zhang could not even find correspondences in spring temperatures between Peking and the Yangtze region. See Zhang Peiyüan, Gong Gaofa, and Zhang Jinrong, "Temperature change and its impact on agriculture in Qing China." Paper, Workshop on Qing population history, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, 26–31 August, 1985, p. 2. For more and later information, see also *The reconstruction of climate in China for historical times*, ed. Zhang Jiacheng (Pei-ching, 1988), which is an excellent compilation of preliminary studies, including local investigations of Inner Mongolia, Pao-ting prefecture, Kuang-tung, and Chiang-hsi.

17 See Helen Dunstan, "The late Ming epidemics: a preliminary survey," *Ch'ing-shih wen-i'i*, 3, No. 3 (November 1975), pp. 1–59, on p. 13.

18 For example, Wakeman, *The great enterprise*, p. 8, n. 15, following Chin Shih, "Peasant economy and rural society in the Lake T'ai area, 1368–1840" (Diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1981). For an article describing the wide discrepancies between tax-related population figures and actual population during a famine, see Shui-yuen Yim, "Famine relief statistics as a guide to the population of sixteenth-century China: a case study of Ho-nan Province," *Ch'ing-shih wen-i'i*, 3, No. 9 (November 1978), pp. 1–30.

In addition to phenological studies¹⁹ that reveal temperature shifts indirectly, an atlas has recently been published that uses impressionistic data culled from local gazetteers statistically adjusted to give consistent overall pictures of droughts and floods. By their nature, the data do not accurately or directly reflect rainfall; for our purposes they are nonetheless even better, for they do reflect the impact of rainfall on harvests, thereby being of greater interest to socio-economic historians.²⁰ Unfortunately, the atlas gives data only from 1470 onward, so other ways must be found for dealing with the early Ming. I have attempted to use the much more impressionistic data provided by Liu Chao-min²¹ up to 1470. For data from 1470 past the end of the dynasty to about 1650, I mainly used the fuller data of the atlas, with a comparison using Liu's data. The purpose of these calculations has been to determine the relative rainfall by separating information on floods from that on droughts and by computing variations from the usual rainfall for every ten-year period.²² The harsh conditions that are reported for Shansi, Shensi, and Shantung in the 1620s and 1630s, known as causes for rebellion, are confirmed by this data, yet these decades were not necessarily worse than others earlier in the dynasty. While it is not possible to set forth here in detail the methods employed, we have combined all the data mentioned above²³ to reach a very tentative description of the prevailing weather conditions during the Ming period (see also Figures 9.1 and 9.2; notice that scales may differ). One overall condition emerges: after a relatively wet Yüan period, the entire Ming period until about 1620 was drier than usual. If we break the dynastic era into sub-periods, the following conclusions seem to be justified:

1) 1350–1450. Cold winters generally obtained throughout China during this period, with warmer spring seasons perhaps beginning around 1400. Still, snow was seen in the Chiang-nan region in 1454. To report only the

19 Useful works are Chu Ko-chen (Chu K'o-chen, Co-ching Chu), "A preliminary study on the climatic fluctuations during the last 5,000 years in China," *Scientia Sinica*, 16, No. 2 (May 1973), pp. 226–56; Zhang, Gong and Zhang, "Temperature change and its impact on agriculture," Liu Chao-min, *Chung-kuo li-shih shang ch'i-hou chih pien-ch'ien* (T'ai-pei, 1982; rev. ed., 1992); and Zhang Jiacheng *The reconstruction of climate in China*. See also *Chung-kuo li-tai t'ien-t'ai jen-huo piao*, eds. Ch'en Kao-yung, et al. (1939; rpt. Shanghai, 1986).

20 Chung-yang ch'i-hsiang-chü ch'i-hsiang k'o-hsüeh yen-chiu-yüan, eds., *Chung-kuo chin wu-pai-nien han-lao fen-pu t'u-chi* (Pei-ching, 1981).

21 Liu Chao-min, *Chung-kuo li-shih shang ch'i-hou chih pien-ch'ien*.

22 Briefly, in Liu's case, every province is given one index for every decade, computed through the addition of yearly measures (from 0 to 3) reflecting qualitative descriptions of weather severity. In the case of the atlas, the already quantified data for a selection of well-represented areas were converted into numbers reflecting the deviation from the average (i.e., the atlas's 1 and 3 became 2, its 2 and 4 became 1) and added up by decade. As is to be expected, the timing of major disasters according to these two methods agrees, but otherwise the two methods do not result in completely similar curves.

23 See also Wang Shao-wu and Zhao Zong-ci, "Droughts and floods in China, 1470–1979." In *Climate and history: studies in past climates and their impact on man*, eds. T. M. L. Wigley, et al. (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 271–88.

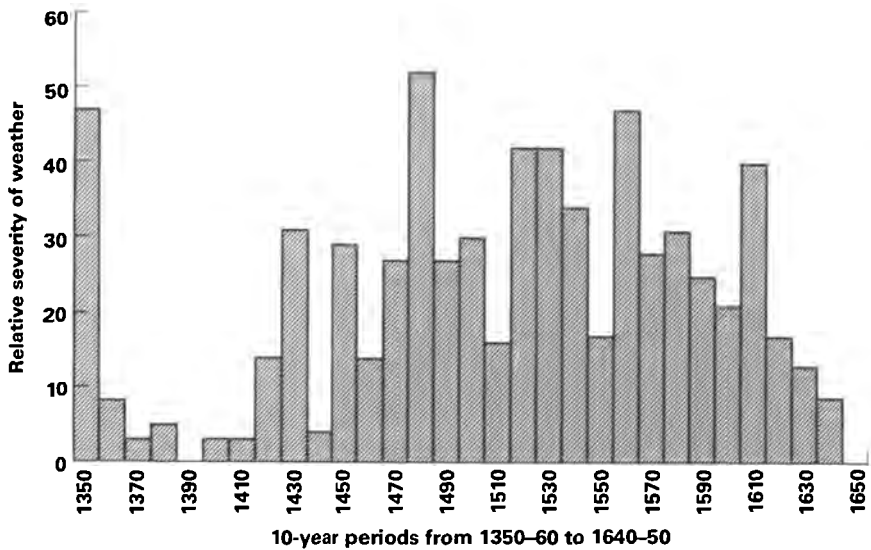


Fig. 9.1. Ming weather according to Liu Chao-min

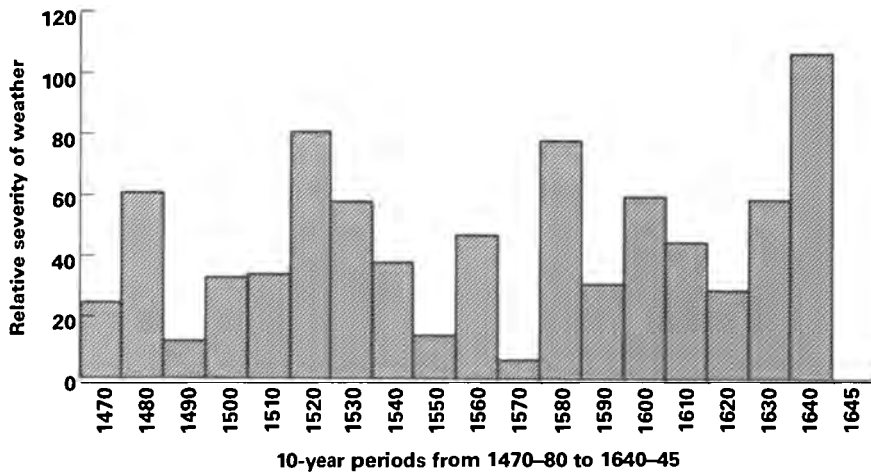


Fig. 9.2. Ming weather according to the *Chung-kuo chin wu-pai-nien han-lao ti-t'u-chi*

most devastating disasters: there were two major droughts, one in 1353-54 in Shansi, Honan, Chekiang, Hu-nan, and Kwangsi; and another in Shansi in the 1420s. The average temperature during this period was perhaps one degree centigrade below average temperatures at present.

2) 1450-1520. This was a relatively dry period with warm springs (with occasional early frosts) and warm winters, especially until 1499. Winter temperatures gradually became colder after 1500: in 1513 the T'ai-hu, P'o-yang, and

Tung-t'ing lakes all froze over. The most frequent pattern of disaster that occurred was flooding in the South and drought in the North. Major droughts occurred in 1452 in Hu-kuang, and in 1504 in Ho-pei, Shantung, Shansi, and Shensi. In 1482, a great flood inundated large parts of Ho-pei and Hu-kuang. Perhaps the greatest disaster of Ming times was the severe famine in 1485–87 that afflicted Shansi, Shantung, Hu-pei, and that reached to the Chiang-nan area; 1484 was an extreme dry year nation-wide.²⁴ The south witnessed a nine-year continuous flood from 1477–1485.²⁵ The average temperature remained about one degree centigrade lower than at present.

3) 1520–70. This was a wetter and relatively cold period, but toward the end of the period the winters grew warmer. There were droughts in the Yangtze region, but floods both to its north and south. In 1528 there were major droughts in Chekiang, Shansi, Shensi, and Hu-pei; the year can be counted as the most serious drought during the whole Ming period.²⁶ In 1568 there was a major drought in Fukien, and generally bad conditions prevailed in the Northern Metropolitan Region (Pei Chih-li or simply Ching-shih), while 1569 was, nationwide, an extremely wet year. The average temperature was 1.5 degrees centigrade colder than at present.

4) 1570–1620. This was a relatively warm period,²⁷ especially during the winters, but frost was experienced during the springs, which nonetheless became increasingly warmer. As a whole, the period became drier, although floods occurred in many regions; 1613 was a year of nationwide flooding. In 1585, the great floodings of the North China Plain occurred. These were followed in 1586 by one of the great epidemics described by Dunstan.²⁸ Average temperatures were one-half a degree centigrade lower than at present. At the end of the period, in the 1610s, there were droughts in Shansi, Fukien, and Shantung; most serious, however, was the nationwide drought of 1589.

5) 1620–1700. The weather became colder and somewhat wetter: in 1618 there was snow in Kwangtung. This marked the onset of the “Little Ice Age.” There were droughts in the 1630s in Shantung and Shansi, followed by epidemics, and repeated floods from 1637 to 1641. There were also major droughts in 1640 and 1641. The average temperature was 1.5 to 2 degrees centigrade lower than at present, especially in the late seventeenth century.

24 Information on extreme dry and wet years nationwide was taken from Zhang Jiacheng, Zhang Xian-gong, and Xu Xiejiang, “Droughts and floods in China during the recent 500 years.” In *The reconstruction of climate in China for historical times*, ed. Zhang, pp. 40–55. Note that their data only start in the mid-15th century.

25 Zhang, Zhang, and Xu, “Droughts and floods.”

26 Zhang, Zhang, and Xu, “Droughts and floods.”

27 For this and other statements on temperatures, see Zheng Sizhong, “Climatic change and its effect on food production during the period 1400–1949.” In *The reconstruction of climate in China for historical times*, ed. Zhang Jiacheng (Pei-ching, 1988), pp. 138–45.

28 Dunstan, “The late Ming epidemics.”

*Population**Introduction: population trends*

Two basic factors affecting an agricultural society's socio-economic conditions are the size of its population and the size of its total cultivated area. Unfortunately, reliable statistics on population and land under cultivation do not exist anywhere before the modern era, and China is no exception. The seemingly systematic figures presented in official publications from Ming and Ch'ing times must be handled with extreme care and are to be reinterpreted in relation to the institutional conventions under which they were compiled. Only then can informed guesses be made at the reality they might conceal. These figures must also be linked to general trends that can be obtained from nonstatistical literary sources and to the small amount of purely demographic data that are becoming available as scholars analyze certain non-official, primarily genealogical, sources. On the basis of all of these elements, some new estimates of Ming population can be made that are somewhat different from previous ones. Such new figures, while tentative, do have implications that should be taken seriously: Ming and Ch'ing economic scholars often adhere to separate theories that, though each sounds plausible by itself, cannot all be considered valid simultaneously when compared with one another.

The founder of the Ming dynasty, Chu Yüan-chang, was from an early point in his career quite attentive to the size of the population in the areas he controlled. This was in part because of the practical needs of conscription and in part because the possession of population records and their use in determining a just distribution of taxes and corvée was a time-honored prerogative of a would-be legitimate claimant to the imperial throne. Already, in 1358, the population of the Nanking region, which in 1356 had become his base area, was supposed to have been entered on new registration lists. In 1370, after the formal proclamation of the dynasty's founding, a *hu-t'ieh* (household register) system was widely instituted. Both the composition of a household (including ages and names) and its taxable assets (mainly land ownership, but also animals and buildings) were to be listed.²⁹ This list was to form the basis for the subsequent nationwide implementation of the population-with-taxation registration that was to be recorded in the *huang-ts'e* (yellow

29 For examples, see Yamane Yukio, *Mindai yōkei seido no tenkai*, Tōkyō joshi daigaku gakkai kenkyū sōsho, 4 (Tōkyō, 1966). Also see Wei Ch'ing-yüan, *Ming-tai huang-ts'e chih-tu* (Pei-ching, 1961), and Liang Fang-chung, "Ming-tai ti hu-t'ieh," *Jen-wen k'o-hsüeh hsüeh-pao*, 2, No. 1 (1943), rpt. in his *Liang Fang-chung ching-chi-shih lun-wen-chi* (Pei-ching, 1989), pp. 219–28. See, for example, Wei, *Ming-tai huang-ts'e chih-tu*, fig. 2, for an actual *ch'ing ts'e kung tan* (form provided for the new registers) document that is often quoted. It dates from 1641, however, and should be used with care; it can not necessarily be taken to reflect earlier *ch'ing ts'e kung tan* forms.

registers), and to be linked to the comprehensive implementation of the so-called *li-chia* (administrative village community) system.³⁰

The way this system functioned will be considered later. In theory, one *li* (administrative community) was composed of 110 landowning, “viable” households, with extra provision for widows, non-adults, and others. In practice, however, from the very beginning, it was a hereditary unit held responsible for providing a variety of tax and corvée assessments, for lending mutual assistance in agriculture, and for compiling and regularly up-dating the original population figures relating to its members. At the time of its first implementation, therefore, we might assume (and there is ample evidence to support such an assumption) that, as far as natural conditions allowed, villages were combined to yield a figure of more or less 110 viable households per administrative community (*li*). Earlier administrative divisions were subdivided or amalgamated, but rarely reconstructed, to approximate this figure. As the population grew, however, the number of administrative communities (*li*) was not adjusted and was not intended to be adjusted. The so-called decennial revisions of the *li* and of the records in the yellow registers (*huang-ts’ê*) could only take into account changes in the already-existing *li* group and reallocate the tax quotas in accordance with economic changes among its households.³¹ There was no clear mechanism, for example, by which to incorporate into the *li* governing a village all the new families who settled in that village. The government held strongly (with few exceptions) to the rule that every household should remain registered where it had been originally registered and thus actively discouraged the adjustment of the *li-chia* system in response to changes other than those changes that were implicit in natural indigenous growth. Moreover, within the *li*, when several sons got married, they were encouraged not to set up their own family units, for that would decrease the number of the higher-grade households that were expected to fulfill the most demanding, and often the only, corvée assignments. As a result, the system could only lose family units, although even the names of extinct households often remained on the records. This practice explains the numerous references to “extinct” households (*chüeh-hu*) and the sometimes consequent amalgamation of *li*, even though all the other evidence points to an increase in population — an increase that often occurred through the influx

30 In addition to the works cited in the preceding note, see also T’ang Wen-chi, *Ming-tai fu-i chih-tu shih* (Pei-ching, 1991), pp. 23–25; and the studies of Luan Ch’eng-hsien: his “Ming-ch’u ti-chu-chih ching-chi chih i k’ao-ch’a-chien hsü Ming-ch’u ti hu-t’ieh yü huang-ts’ê chih-tu,” *Tōyō gakubō*, 68, Nos. 1–2 (January 1987), pp. 35–70; and his “Shu Genshō ni yotte sanzōserareta Ryūhōki gyōrinsatsu ni tsuite,” trans. Tsurumi Naohiro, *Tōyō gakubō*, 70, Nos. 1–2 (January 1989), pp. 25–48.

31 For a late example, see Okuzaki Hiroshi, “Chūgoku Mindai no kasō minshū no ikikata-zensho ni arawareta ichi sokumen,” *Seniū shigaku*, 13 (April 1981), pp. 22–50.

of new families from the outside. Territorially, a *li*, after a century, would consist of those “old” households descended from the original families, even if they had moved elsewhere, while newer families in the villages would only be linked to the *li* indirectly through land taxes or informal local arrangements for corvée redistribution. They might be taxed in one way or another, but did not directly belong to the *li* arrangements.³²

There were some exceptions to this general pattern, mainly in northern China, where, faced with a large floating population in the early fifteenth century, the government adopted a policy of encouraging migration to counties with much vacant land. The authorities also temporarily and sporadically allowed formal re-registration (*fu-chi*, or *chi-chi*) there. In 1431, a general re-registration was allowed for those households in northern China that possessed more than 50 *mu*³³ (a minimal figure for economically viable households there) and in North China during the 1430s and 1440s new “immigrant” *li* were generally combined with existing *li* to form new divisions.

The Ching-hsiang region on the borders of Shensi, Honan, Hu-kuang, and Szechwan provinces was another exception to the usual practice regarding the *li*. This area had become a major area for resettling migrants, although during the Hung-wu (1368–98) reign period it had been cleared of inhabitants and declared off-limits to settlers because it provided a perfect refuge for bandits. But that approach was unsuccessful. By the early fifteenth century, the

32 Increasingly, scholars find new evidence for this phenomenon, whereby even the names of the early Ming ancestor households remained on the tax rolls while they were applied to the descendants of those households. These descendants were to arrange among themselves how to perform the *li-chia* duties which became hereditarily attached to such household names. Such evidence is typically found in family genealogies and records, not in local gazetteers. For examples in Fukien, see Cheng Chen-man, “Ming-Ch’ing Fu-chien ti li-chia hu-chi yü chia-tsu tsu-chih,” *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-shi-shih yen-chiu*, 2, (1989), pp. 38–44; in Kwangtung, see Katayama Tsuyoshi, “Shindai Kanton-shō Shukō deruta no zukōsei ni tsuite-zeiryō, koseki, dōzoku,” *Tōyō gakubō*, 63, Nos. 3–4 (March 1982), pp. 1–34, and Liu Chih-wei, “Ming-Ch’ing Chu-chiang san-chiao-chou ti ch’ü li-chia-chih chung ‘hu’ ti yen-pien,” *Chung-shan ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao* (*she*), 1988/3, pp. 64–73; and in Hui-chou, see Suzuki Hiroyuki, “Mindai Kishūfu no zokusan to komei,” *Tōyō gakubō*, 71, Nos. 1–2 (December 1989), pp. 1–29. In early Ming times, the *li* and *chia* were supposed to remain more or less equally able to shoulder their duties and, in order to facilitate this, larger commoner households were allowed to split up under certain conditions, unlike the case with military and artisan households. As time went by, however, it became more important for the government not to have larger households disappear from the tax registers and the names and duties of the registered households became hereditary. See especially Liu Chih-wei, “Li-chia-chih chung ‘hu’ ti yen-pien,” pp. 66–68. In 1451, the setting up of descendant households (*fen-hu* or *fen-hsi*) was even forbidden, see T’ang Wen-chi, *Ming-tai fu-i chih-tu shih*, p. 145. A history of the varied approaches to the splitting up of households is given in Kim Chong-bak [Chin Chung-po], “Ming-tai li-chia-chih yü fu-i chih-tu chih kuan-hsi chi ch’i yen-pien” (Diss., Chung-kuo wen-hua ta-hsüeh, 1985), pp. 199–205. Lineage-like households could also originate in land belonging to a lineage as a whole, see Suzuki, “Mindai Kishūfu no zokusan to komei.”

33 Also often transliterated *mu*; its size can vary, but can normally be taken in the Ming period as some 6.144 ares (metric) or 0.152 acres.

region was said to have had more than 200,000 illegal squatters; and in the 1420s several counties established additional migrant *li*. When another flood of migrants caused several rebellions in 1465–76, during which huge numbers of new illegal settlers were again expelled only to return, a great number of households were finally allowed to re-register there.³⁴

These examples make it clear that the number of *li* existing during the Ming has little to do with an accurate compilation of population figures. Attempts to estimate population by multiplying the number of *li* by 110 for their constituent households, (or, even worse, by 550, using a hypothetical “universal multiplier” of five persons to a household) are less than useless for any period after the first reign of the Ming.

The accuracy of the reported, that is, the registered, population figures varied according to their significance within the local *li* system. This significance was quite different in northern China from what it was in southern China: in the North, both the amount of corvée labor as well as the amount of monetary taxes was imposed on the basis of the assigned grade of each household, and, more specifically, on the number of adult male *ting*, that is, able-bodied males from age sixteen to sixty, a household contained. There was, therefore, a general interest in maintaining records that reflected the distribution of assets (including both human and animal power) that were relatively more important in northern China because of the nature of the farming methods there than these same assets were in the South. In addition to that factor favoring record keeping, the higher degree of official control in northern China, the existence of fewer local powerful groups such as lineages with degree holders, and the possibility there of incorporating immigrants into the *li-chia* system, makes the record keeping, especially in Ho-peí and Honan, comparatively more trustworthy for a longer period of time. In the South, illegal practices that were well-entrenched, less equal land distribution, and the common (and more or less officially condoned) practice of not registering women and children that often resulted in the latter’s continued nonregistration after becoming adults, produced very defective population records. Little was done to remedy this, since these records were not directly needed for tax purposes. Only much later did some corrective measures appear, but most unjustifiable distributions of tax levies in the South were dealt with by new land surveys and newer tax systems that no longer relied on population figures that had become

34 See Frederick W. Mote, “The Ch’eng-hua and Hung-chih reigns, 1465–1505.” In *The Ming dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 1*, Vol. 7, eds. Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 384–89.

meaningless relics of the past tax system.³⁵ There were a few attempts at new household registration surveys in later Ming times, but they were sporadic and of minor importance in comparison with the attempt at newer land surveys discussed below.

During the Wan-li reign (1573–1620), perhaps in connection with the vigorous attempts to reconstitute the local tax structures on a new basis, many counties increased their population figures even when those had been reported as decreasing for many years prior to that. It is the hypothesis of Leiff Littrup that the new figures may have been based on newly compiled local records, of which no evidence exists.³⁶ More probably, they reflect an updating of the households still on the list rather than a complete new census. For example, in Hui-an county (Fukien), Yeh Ch'un-chi (1532–95) has left us much quantitative material from the *li* and, barring some largely explainable discrepancies, this material seems to be somewhat reliable.³⁷ The problem with this "new" investigation is that the figures it produced are almost unchanged from those of 1489. A likely explanation is that these figures represent only another re-investigation of the descendants of the old *li* group that ignored large numbers of residents who had subsequently come to live there while remaining outside the system. Also, the figures for women can be shown to have been made up using average multipliers.

The figures for *k'ou*, or individuals (as opposed to the figures for *hu* or households) for northern China are more reliable, and show a much higher rate of increase than do those for households. That appears to reflect the reason given above, namely, that a household was not required to divide and was encouraged not to do so when sons or grandsons married: a practice which did not constitute tax evasion per se. We must assume that before corvée labor became too harsh, and while average conditions were stable and economic differentiation between households in a *li* was not too great and was still open to change, it was in the interest of the members of the *li* themselves

35 Hence the skepticism necessary for investigating population, as displayed, for example, by Ho Ping-ti, *Studies on the population of China, 1368–1953*, *Harvard East Asian Studies*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass., 1959). For many Ming comments on the population registers, see Wang Yü-ch'üan, "Ming-ch'ao jen lun Ming-ch'ao hu-k'ou," *Chung-kuo li-shih po-wu-kuan kuan-k'an*, 13–14 (September 1989), pp. 160–69.

36 See Leiff Littrup, *Subbureaucratic government in China in Ming times: a study of Shandong Province in the sixteenth century*, Institutet for sammenlignende kulturforskning, Serie B: Skrifter 64 (Oslo, 1981), e.g. p. 52.

37 See, for example, Yamane Yukio, "Jüroku seiki Chügoku ni okeru aru kokō tōkei ni suite-Fukken Kei'an-ken no," *Tōyō daigaku kiyō*, 6 (March 1954), pp. 161–72, and Sabine Petzinna-Gilster, *Hui'an, ein chinesischer Kreis im 16. Jahrhundert in China: dargestellt an den Aufzeichnungen des Magistrats Ye Chunji* (Hamburg, 1984). A new, not completely reliable edition is Fu-chien-sheng ti-fang-shih pien-tsuan wei-yüan-hui, ed., *Ch'üan-chou li-shih yen-chiu-hui*, Hui-an hsien-chih pan-kung-shih, Hui-an-hsien wen-hua kuan, coll. (*Ming*) *Yeh Ch'un-chi chuan: Hui-an cheng-shu* (*fu: Ch'ung-wu-so ch'eng-chih*), Fu-chien ti-fang-chih ts'ung-k'an (Fu-chou, 1987).

to have some means to redistribute tax and corvée quotas equitably. However, when agriculture became increasingly monetized, other means for real-locating tax and corvée burdens came into being. At the same time, increasing internal economic stratification and increasingly differential access to government circles lessened the populace's general will or ability to counteract the private interests of the powerful. As a consequence of these changes, the quality of the records finally declined even in the North.

In the South, the factors detrimental to the *li-chia* system were present from the very beginnings of the dynasty. There, the ratio of individuals (*k'ou*) to households dropped instead of increasing, for it was even easier to evade registering individuals than it was to evade registering whole households.

Internal migration patterns

During the Ming, two major types of population relocation affected population trends and official population records. One was the forced resettlement of people by government decree; the other was internal migration, whether it occurred under the pressure of distress from calamities or voluntarily.

At the beginning of the Ming period, large parts of northern China lay devastated, either as a result of the civil wars that led to the founding of the Ming or as a legacy of earlier disorders. To remedy this, both the Hung-wu and Yung-lo emperors relocated large numbers of people.³⁸ Some three million people were resettled as a result of such policies during the Hung-wu period alone. They came mainly from Shansi, which had not been as deeply affected by the mid-fourteenth century wars as other places.³⁹ An "immigrant stele" discovered in Ho-nan records a migration group (of 110 households exactly, showing close adherence to the official norms) from Shansi.⁴⁰ The voluntary movement of people from Shansi continued on such a scale that the government later had to order migrants to return to the area. The resettlement policies were a major influence on the development of northern China and have left their traces in the dialects and customs there. In the South, the Hung-wu period also saw forced movement of population away from the rich coastal zones of Chekiang and Fukien to the interiors of those provinces.

38 See Hsü Hung, "Ming Hung-wu nien-chien ti jen-k'ou i-hsi." In *Ti-i-chieh Li-shih yü Chung-kuo she-hui pien-ch'ien* (*Chung-kuo she-hui-shih*) *yen-f'ao-hui*, ed. Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan san-min chu-i yen-chiu-so (T'ai-pei, 1982), pp. 252–93.

39 See, for example, Yonekura, *Tōa no shūraku—Nihon oyobi Chūgoku no shūraku no rekishichirigakuteki hikaku kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1960); Ishida Hiroshi, "Kaihōzen no Kahoku nōson no ichi seikaku — toku ni son-raku to byō to no kanren ni oite," *Kansai daigaku keizai ronshū*, 32/2 (1984), 32/3 (1984), rpt. as ch. 6 of his *Chūgoku nōson shakai keizai kōzō no kenkyū* (Kyōto, 1986); or see Makino Tatsumi, "Chūgoku no ijū densetsu-toku ni sono sosenshō densetsu o chūshin to shitei," (1945–53), combined with unpublished material and rpt. in his *Makino Tatsumi chosakushū dai-5-kan, Chūgoku no ijū densetsu/Kanton genjū minzoku kō* (Tokyo, 1985), pp. 1–163.

40 Kao Hsin-hua, "Ming-ch'u ch'ien-min-pei," *Wen-wu ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao*, 3, (1958) p. 49.

Two other major internal migrations had less to do with government intervention. The steady flow, especially during the fifteenth century of the floating populations of uprooted vagrants (*liu-min*) into the Ching-hsiang area adjoining western Honan has already been discussed. A similar movement occurred from the Kiangsi plain into the Kiangsi mountains, and from the Kiangsi plain into the whole of Hu-kuang as well as into the newly established provinces.⁴¹ Most of the migration into Hu-kuang, a fertile, relatively empty region, occurred during the very early Ming. Hu-kuang would not receive large numbers of immigrants again until the early Ch'ing.⁴² The only exception was the area around the Tung-t'ing Lake, which continued to attract immigrants. Many of the migrants came as artisans and peddlers, but they easily made the transition to the status of tenant farmers in their new places of residence. Because they were *liu-min* (migrants) they were not added to the *li-chia* lists; and through their development of new, and therefore untaxed land, they were able to become fully independent farmers.⁴³

These internal migrations were, in part, induced by the government itself. Tax quotas fixed early in the Ming were low in what had been underdeveloped regions, and they remained low despite subsequent development. As a consequence, these areas continued to attract outsiders, while people tended to flee those regions that had been the most stable and prosperous at the beginning of the dynasty because higher tax rates in those more prosperous areas reflected their better original conditions.

Population growth during the Ming also resulted in very localized migration. In eastern Chekiang, for example, migration increased mainly after 1550 as lineages branched off and moved nearby, often within the same rural sub-county (*hsiang*) of a county. New settlements often were placed between existing villages, an approach that usually involved only very small irrigation schemes. This practice of moving from one's original location while in fact remaining very near it possibly permitted a form of tax evasion by allowing an escape from the previous *li-chia* registration: the household that moved might be listed as a "*ch'ieh-hu*" or "extinct household," or at least its assessment in the original *li* would be lowered; land taxes might still be required, but

41 See Fu I-ling, "Ming-tai Chiang-hsi ti kung-shang-yeh jen-k'ou chi ch'i i-tung," *Tou-sou*, 41 (November 1980), pp. 1-7.

42 As can be seen from the statistics provided in Peter C. Perdue, "Insiders and outsiders - the Xiangtan riot of 1819 and collective action in Hunan," *Modern China*, 12, No. 2 (April 1986), pp. 166-201, and Peter C. Perdue, *Exhausting the earth - state and peasant in Hunan, 1500-1850*, Harvard East Asian Monographs, 130 (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 101-13.

43 See O Küm-so ng, "Minmatsu Dôteiko shūhen no suiri kaihatsu to nōson shakai," trans. Yamane Yukio, *Chūgoku suirishi kenkyū*, 10 (October 1980), pp. 14-35, and Fu I-ling, "Ming-tai Chiang-hsi."

not corvée labor. Although this practice was not strictly legal, it could hardly be prevented.⁴⁴

Demographic indicators

Lately there have been increasing efforts to clarify such demographic characteristics of the later imperial Chinese population as the number of spouses a person might have, widowhood rates, marital fertility, sex ratios, the differences in the ages of marriage partners, and the like. Samples regarding the elite in the population, even imperial household genealogies, have provided convenient data. Other family records such as genealogies (*chia-p'u*) also are beginning to be exploited more fully. Ever newer and more intricate statistical procedures are used to extrapolate data from deficient sources. But while it certainly is true, as Stevan Harrell and others have demonstrated,⁴⁵ that a Chinese great lineage is much closer to being a reflection of a complex society that incorporates great differences in wealth and status than is a European clan, and that therefore the results of studying great lineages are not as socially biased as would be a study of the British peerage, it is nonetheless difficult to draw readily generalizable information from the study of these lineages. Genealogists using Chinese materials must take into consideration many complex factors.⁴⁶

Having stated this caution, it is nonetheless interesting to note some of the findings of demographic historians. All in all, their findings tend to show a general lowering of the rates of population increase through the Ming period and on into the Ch'ing, owing mainly to an increase in mortality. One very important finding is that the average life expectancy at birth seems to have

44 Much detailed information has been omitted in this summary. See also, for example, Ueda Makoto, "Chiiki no rireki – Sekkōshō Hōkaken Chūgikō," *Shakai keizai shigaku*, 49, No. 2 (June 1983), pp. 31–51; and his "Chiiki to sōzoku – Sekkōshō sankanpu," *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 94 (March 1984), pp. 115–60. As one example of many, the forefather of the Hsü lineage had migrated to Hsiao-shan from his native Shan-yin county (seat in Shao-hsing), both in Chekiang, to avoid the population census of Chu Yüan-chang. See Liu Ts'ui-jung, "The demography of two Chinese clans in Hsiao-shan, Chekiang, 1650–1850." In *Family and population in East Asian history*, eds. Susan B. Hanley and Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford, 1985), p. 17.

45 Harrell, Stevan, "The rich get children: segmentation, stratification and population in three Che-chiang lineages, 1500–1850." In *Family and population in East Asian history*, eds. Hanley and Wolf, pp. 81–109. In Liu Ts'ui-jung's large sample of genealogies (Liu Ts'ui-jung, *Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch'i chia-tsu jen-k'ou yü she-hui ching-chi pien-ch'ien* [T'ai-pei: Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan ching-chi yen-chiu-so, 1992], only 1.95 percent of all individuals had any civil or military degree. This might be larger than the population as a whole, but does not make genealogies too unrepresentative to be useful.

46 See, for example, Ted A. Telford, "Survey of social demographic data in Chinese genealogies," *Late Imperial China*, 7, No. 2 (December 1986), pp. 118–48. Liu Ts'ui-jung, *Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch'i chia-tsu jen-k'ou*, lists as the most serious problems that daughters, children who died early, and dates of marriage are not always included.

decreased quite generally through Ming and Ch'ing times.⁴⁷ Differences between the mortality rates of higher elite members and persons of lower status could be remarkably large.⁴⁸

In sum, the various data that can be adduced to argue for a trend of deterioration in the quality of life and population growth rates from mid-Ming to mid-Ch'ing times are: an increase in the percentage of people remaining unmarried; a decrease in the number of men marrying more than one woman; and, especially, a steady nationwide decrease (with the possible exception of Hu-pei) of the average age at death during the period from 1500 to 1800. These data have been plotted in Figure 9.3. This is only countered by a slightly lower age of first birth from 1675 to 1725 in comparison with earlier and later centuries. We might, therefore, conclude that there should have been a steady slow decrease in population growth rates from at least 1500 to 1800, except possibly for the period of recovery from the devastation during the Ming-Ch'ing transition.⁴⁹

Population estimates

To attempt a new estimation of Chinese population in 1380, 1500, 1600, and 1650, we must utilize as a base the census figures compiled by the central government in 1380, 1391, and 1393 – the last being a reinvestigation of the previous census. These late fourteenth-century figures are lower for Kiangsu, Kiangsi, Fukien, Hu-nan, and Kwangsi than the corresponding figures from the Sung and Yüan dynasties. The lower figures might indicate that under-registration was a larger factor than Ho Ping-ti and other authors

47 See Michel Cartier, "Nouvelles données sur la démographie chinoise à l'époque des Ming (1368–1644)," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 28, No. 6 (November–December 1973), pp. 1341–59; Yüan I-chin, "Life tables for a southern Chinese family from 1365 to 1849," *Human Biology*, 3, No. 2 (1931), pp. 157–79; and Liu Ts'ui-jung, "Ming-Ch'ing jen-k'ou chih tseng-chih yü ch'ien-i – Ch'ang-chiang chung-hsia-yü ti-ch'ü tsu-p'u tz'u-liao chih fen-hsi." In *Ti-erh-chieh Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih yen-t'ao-hui*, 1, ed. Hsü Cho-yün, Mao Han-guang, and Liu Ts'ui-jung, Han-hsüeh yen-chiu tzu-liao chi fu-wu chung-hsin ts'ung-k'an, lun-chu lei (T'ai-pei, 1983), pp. 285–316. Liu Ts'ui-jung's multi-article work has now culminated in *Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch' i chia-tsu jen-k'ou*. Historical demography is currently quite a popular topic in the People's Republic of China. Unlike William Lavelly, James Lee, and Wang Feng, "Chinese demography: the state of the field," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 49, No. 4 (November 1990), pp. 807–34, however, I do not value most of these works highly, since they do not even try to raise such basic issues as the reliability of the historical reporting procedures. Michel Cartier, "Une naissance difficile: la démographie historique en Chine populaire," *Revue bibliographique de sinologie* (n. s.), 9 (1991), pp. 119–26, obviously would agree with this.

48 See Ted A. Telford, "Patching the holes in Chinese genealogies: mortality in the lineage populations of Tongcheng county, 1300–1880," *Late Imperial China*, 11, No. 2 (December 1990), pp. 116–37.

49 All the above data are derived from Liu Ts'ui-jung's work *Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch' i chia-tsu jen-k'ou*. It must be said that she dates many of the above trends rather unquestioningly to the Ch'ing period. This might be owing to the current popularity of a hypothesized so-called "Ch'ing population explosion." Her data, especially those in table 5.3 (pp. 182–89) and here graphed as Figure 9.3, clearly show, however, that the tendency to increased mortality began at least as early as 1500 (earlier data not given).

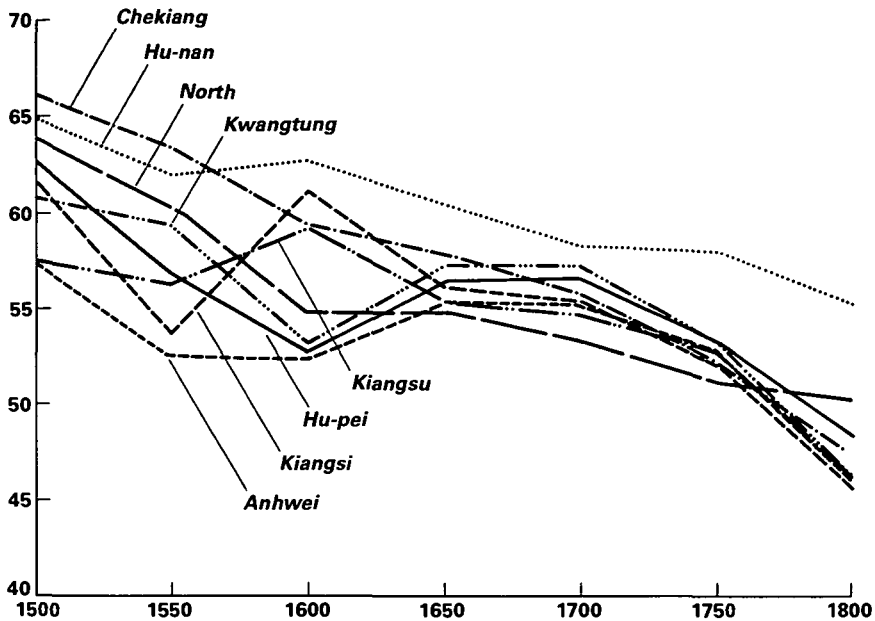


Fig. 9.3. Regional life expectancy from 1500 to 1800. Note: The figures indicate the average age at death of the population already having reached the Chinese age of 15. All data are taken from Liu Ts'ui-jung, *Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch'i chia-tsu jen-k'ou*

have implied.⁵⁰ Yokota Seizō, the author of an old, but still useful study of the Ming population, suggests this.⁵¹ We might, therefore, be quite conservative in accepting a population figure of 85 million for 1380, as Yokota roughly estimated. This would add 25 million to the official census figure of 60 million, distributed as follows: under-registration of 5 million in the North; under-representation of 10 million (17 percent) of females and children nationwide; and under-registration of 10 million distributed among Ssu-ch'uan, the coastal provinces, and the outer tier of provinces.

Growth rates in the period up to 1500, calculated for a few prefectures and counties where relatively reliable data seem to exist, range from 0.46 percent to 1.27 percent.⁵² Most of these counties were in Ho-nan and Shantung, but the economic vigor along the coast and in Chiang-nan must have resulted

⁵⁰ Ho, *Studies on the population*.

⁵¹ Yokota Seizō, "Mindai ni okeru kokō no idō genshō ni tsuite," *Tōyō gakuhō*, 26, No. 1 (1938), pp. 116–38; 26, No. 2 (1939), pp. 122–64.

⁵² My own estimates, based upon sample counties in Ho-pei, Honan, Shantung, and Kiangsu. The lower figure refers to Ch'i-tung over a period from 1391 to 1472, the higher figure to En-hsien, over a period from the Hung-wu reign (ca. 1391 probably) to 1472. Both places are in northern Shantung. Of course, the selection of so-called "reliable" counties is my own to begin with.

in similar growth rates at the very least. We can only conclude that our hypothesis of the three different growth rate scenarios that follow is very conservative when compared with known possible growth rates under peaceful conditions in China. The following scenarios are premised upon an almost certainly excessive slowdown in population growth rates throughout the entire Ming dynastic era, even while the economy was growing. Moreover, the initial population growth rates used here are already lower than estimated “normal” rates provided by other authors.

The high hypothesis envisages a 0.6 percent increase in population per year from 1380 to 1500, 0.5 percent from 1500 to 1600, and 0.4 percent from 1600 to 1650 (from which could be subtracted losses through war and disasters, although those are probably covered in the lower rate for the final fifty years). The middle hypothesis envisages growth rates of 0.5 percent, 0.4 percent, and 0.3 percent respectively. An implausibly low set of growth rates for the same three periods would be 0.4 percent, 0.3 percent, and 0.2 percent. The results of applying these figures are nevertheless revealing. The high hypothesis gives 175 million by 1500, 289 million for 1600, and 353 million for 1650. The last figure is almost equal to the official figure from the year 1812, which is perhaps the most reliable official figure after 1393. The middle hypothesis gives figures of 155, 231, and 268 million for the three dates, while the quite implausible lower hypothesis gives 137, 185, and 204 million. All of these figures, including the lowest of the three figures for 1650, are much higher than the widely used estimates of Ho Ping-ti. To repeat, in developing these figures, very conservative growth rates were used that are lower than the quantitative data available would imply; and these low rates were used despite the literary record, which describes a vigorous economy since at least 1500.⁵³

Various kinds of evidence support the idea that the Ming population grew at rates nearer to those of the first two hypotheses. In any case, these hypotheses imply rates of growth lower than those Ho assumes for the Ch'ing period. Yim determined a figure of 200 million for 1600 based upon some famine relief measures in Honan in 1593–94.⁵⁴ Chao Kang, starting from the indubitably erroneous acceptance of a figure of exactly 60 million for 1380, follows a different line of reasoning to propose figures of from 164 to 298 million for 1595, and he suggests a “very reasonable” overall growth rate of 0.6 percent for the entire Ming period.⁵⁵ Our own figures, which end later but start with 85 million for 1380, assume much lower growth rates. The actual popu-

53 As is evident from the data assembled in Ho, *Studies on the population*.

54 See Yim, “Famine relief statistics.”

55 Liu Ts'ui-jung, *Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch'i chia-tsu jen-k'ou*, p. 247, gives an intrinsic growth rate of the lineages studied by her of 0.7025 percent.

lation probably lies between our middle and high hypotheses. In any event, all evidence points to the fact that much of the later imperial era's population "explosion," which some Ch'ing economic and social historians use as a general solution to explain a wide variety of social and economic phenomena, was also a Ming, and not exclusively a Ch'ing, phenomenon.⁵⁶ All of the literary data on overpopulation relative to land under cultivation in the late Ming should be taken seriously. Moreover, we should particularly consider whether population growth might have been an important factor in causing the rural commercialization that is evident in many kinds of sources from the late Ming.

As for provincial estimates, the relative contribution of each province to the 1393 total of 85 million was tabulated, and then the same was done for the 1812 data.⁵⁷ These figures were averaged to obtain the figures for the 1600 distribution. The resulting rates were then applied in the varying multiples necessary in order to achieve the figures of 230 million (for 1600, using the middle hypothesis) and 290 million (for 1650, using the middle hypothesis; or for 1600, using the high hypothesis). These data are presented in the following table, where other columns give the average growth rate per province (hypothesis A refers to the middle estimate for 1600, and hypothesis B to the high estimate for 1600. (See, for all of the above, Tables 9.1 and 9.2.)

Area under cultivation

Introduction: cadastral surveys

The unreliability of the official population data is not mirrored exactly in the data that is supposed to reflect the amount of taxed, that is, cultivated, land. Landholding was of a direct and basic relevance for tax collection, and became even more important when the commuted labor service increasingly came to be assessed in part on the basis of landholding. This increased assessment was an additional incentive for unscrupulous persons to conceal their landholdings and register them improperly. On the other hand, there were coun-

⁵⁶ One is reminded of the poor fit between explanations of Tokugawa and Meiji historians: in order to emphasize Meiji (or, here, Ch'ing) successes, starting points are used which are unacceptably low ending points for Tokugawa (or, here, Ming) scholars.

⁵⁷ The 1812 data are the first relatively reliable ones after the Ch'ing began to collect data; they are more or less equivalent to what is published in the *Chia-ch'ing i-t'ung-chih* (*General gazetteer of the Chia-ch'ing period* (1796–1820)), which dates slightly later. For the importance of this set of figures, see G. William Skinner, "Sichuan's population in the nineteenth century: lessons from disaggregated data," *Late Imperial China*, 8, No. 1 (1987), pp. 1–79. Skinner found these data to be the most reliable, relatively speaking, and I agree with him judging from my work with Hu-kuang data; we both are more skeptical of late Ch'ing data than is Ho Ping-ti.

TABLE 9.1
Available regional population data for 1393 and 1812 (units '000)

Province	1393 Population (i)	%	1812 Population	%	Estimated % in 1650
<i>Nan Chih-li</i>	10,756	17.76	72,012	19.99	18.91
<i>Pei Chih-li</i>	1,927	3.18	27,991	7.77	5.55
<i>Chekiang</i>	10,488	17.32	26,257	7.29	12.15
<i>Kiangsi</i>	8,982	14.83	23,047	6.40	10.48
<i>Hu-kuang</i>	4,703	7.77	46,023	12.77	10.35
<i>Shantung</i>	5,256	8.68	28,959	8.04	8.35
<i>Fukien</i>	3,917	6.47	14,779	4.10	5.25
<i>Shansi</i>	4,072	6.73	14,004	3.89	5.26
<i>Honan</i>	1,913	3.16	23,037	6.39	4.83
<i>Shensi and Kan-su</i>	2,317	3.83	25,400	7.05	5.49
<i>Szechwan and Kweichow</i>	1,467	2.42	26,724	7.42	5.00
<i>Kwangtung</i>	3,008	4.97	19,174	5.32	5.15
<i>Kwangsi</i>	1,482	2.45	7,314	2.03	2.23
<i>Yunnan</i>	259	0.43	5,561	1.54	1.00
Total	60,548	100.0	360,282	100.0	100.0

Source: Based principally on tables chia 69 and chia 82 of Liang Fang-chung, "*Chung-kuo li-tai hu-k'ou*"; the estimated percent of population in 1650 is computed linearly on basis of the 1400 (1393) and 1800 (1812) data.

TABLE 9.2
Population "guesstimates" for late Ming China (units '000)

Province	Hypothesis A: 230 million	Hypothesis B: 290 million	Average yearly growth (Hyp. A) (base 60 million)	Average yearly growth (Hyp. B) (base 60 million)
<i>Nan Chih-li</i>	43,495	54,841	0.56	0.65
<i>Pei Chih-li</i>	12,759	16,088	0.76	0.85
<i>Chekiang</i>	27,941	35,229	0.39	0.49
<i>Kiangsi</i>	24,113	30,403	0.40	0.49
<i>Hu-kuang</i>	23,803	30,012	0.65	0.74
<i>Shantung</i>	19,203	24,213	0.52	0.61
<i>Fukien</i>	12,072	15,221	0.45	0.54
<i>Shansi</i>	12,102	15,259	0.44	0.53
<i>Honan</i>	11,103	13,999	0.71	0.80
<i>Shensi and Kan-su</i>	12,624	15,917	0.68	0.77
<i>Szechwan and Kweichow</i>	11,496	14,495	0.83	0.92
<i>Kwangtung</i>	11,846	14,936	0.55	0.64
<i>Kwangsi</i>	5,136	6,476	0.50	0.59
<i>Yunnan</i>	2,307	2,909	0.88	0.97
Total	230,000	290,000	0.54	0.63
<i>if base 85 million is used for 1400</i>			0.40	0.49

Source: Based principally on tables chia 69 and chia 82 of Liang Fang-chung, "*Chung-kuo li-tai hu-k'ou*".

tervailing pressures against dishonesty: magistrates and persons in a locale who were well-intended would wish to maintain, at least locally, a reasonably fair distribution of tax burdens. Most important of all, registration meant one's ownership of land was officially recognized – a recognition that could be used in the ubiquitous land disputes. The many types of abuses we hear about from the very beginning of the Ming were matters of wrongly registered ownership, not necessarily under-registration per se. The forms some of these abuses took were *kuei-chi* (falsely attach to), the practice of registering land under the names of others (with or without their knowledge); *sa-fei* or *fei-sa* (scatter around), whereby the fiction was created that one's possessions were divided into smaller units in order to evade the progressively assigned corvée assessments; *p'ou-hsien* (commendation to a more powerful household), the entrustment of one's land to a member of aristocratic or degree-holding households, which were eligible, legally or by custom, for exemption privileges. Often all or parts of the tax obligation were sold separately from the property itself or the usufruct rights to it in return for a portion of the rent. This manipulation, if properly carried out, could totally confuse the records. Blatant evasion of tax obligations existed, as it has in all ages, although non-payment of taxes on recently reclaimed land was legal and did not constitute tax evasion.

Even when land was legally registered, there were still many ways for the powerful to obtain lower tax assignments. In the North they occupied original "great *mu* land" (*ta-mu*), which had been measured using a larger land unit measure than the "small *mu* land" (*hsiao-mu*), which had been measured and reclaimed during the early Ming colonization schemes. In the South, the powerful registered their land at the "light rates," often improperly substituting lower private land (*min-t'ien*) tax rates instead of the high tax-with-rent rates that were charged for "official land" or "government land" (*kuan-t'ien*).

Land surveys were also frequently inaccurate. A lack of trained personnel and the lack of mathematically sound ways of assessing irregularly shaped holdings helped prevent accurate surveys. A recent writer has pointed out that a book, published in 1524, that gave sound instructions for assessing land was not, in fact, used in subsequent surveys.⁵⁸ Moreover, as many skeptical modern writers have pointed out,⁵⁹ a wide array of non-standard *ch'ih* (foot) and *pu* (pace) measurements were applied in measuring the basic *mu*

58 Chao Kang and Ch'en Chung-i, *Chung-kuo ching-chi chih-tu shih lun*, Chung-kuo chih-tu shih lun ts'ung-shu, 1 (Taipei, 1986), especially ch. 2; and Chao, Kang, *Man and land in Chinese history – an economic analysis* (Stanford, 1986). The book in question is Wang Wen-su, *Kuei chih suan hsieh pao chieh* (*Precious mirror of mathematics both ancient and modern*).

59 See Ho, *Studies on the population*.

(which had a surface area equal to about one-sixth of an English acre). In addition, after the first reign of the dynasty, the newly prepared basic cadasters were not always centrally stored. This factor made them susceptible to local manipulation.

In constraint of these basic abuses, however, a *li* often possessed great social control: at registration, people were permitted to complain about the assessments of their neighbors. If their accusations were found to be true, the original transgressor could be heavily punished and the plaintiffs, as accusers, might be rewarded. The methods used by the Chinese surveys – self-assessment and self-reporting in the first instance, before random sample surveys were used to verify them – were not as unreliable a means of land assessment as the most skeptical modern authors would have us believe. They appear to be among the best pre-modern methods available for arriving at locally accepted tax assessments. They did not work well in those areas in which measures of social control generally had broken down, such as in areas where *chi-chuang hu*, absentee landlords with no stake in the community, became prevalent; or in areas where the legal system began to display contradictions, as where privileged households had grown too numerous. Assessments that were reasonably fair were probably the norm: there were not too many complaints except in precisely those instances in which such special circumstances as the presence of many absentee landlords obtained.

Whether the results of all of these local, practicable solutions were systematically reported to higher administrative levels, and whether these solutions were uniformly applied in ways that make the resulting data comparable is more problematic. Unfortunately, in most cases the data are not comparable. The tax quotas were set in the Hung-wu period at the beginning of the dynasty and, until the Wan-li reign, were not supposed to have been increased. The lack of a need to report changes, which was most likely accompanied by a fear that assessments would be increased if accurate figures that were newer and higher were reported, often resulted in a system in which two sets of records were kept. One set used the old quotas and was reported to the central authorities. The other set incorporated more recent data and was applied locally. It is very revealing to analyze the data when both kinds of records are available. The so-called “conversion *mu*” (*che-mu*), that many writers see as preventing any real understanding of data on cultivated areas,⁶⁰ is only in small part a phenomenon held over from earlier times. In fact, the conversion *mu* resulted from the particular political and historical conditions of Ming times. Rather than indicating that the data are unreliable,

60 Ho, *Studies on the population*, and Liang Fang-chung, *Chung-kuo li-tai hu-k'ou, t'ien-ti, t'ien-fu t'ung-chi* (Shanghai, 1980), pp. 335–38.

the conversion *mu* permits a general conception of the standard *mu* to be surmised, even though the conversion *mu* found its way into the gazetteers and other documentary repositories only in some cases and not in others.⁶¹ Using the conversion rates given, it is sometimes easy to obtain the “real” figures used locally. In other cases, much of the complicated paperwork found in local gazetteers is the result not of a complicated reality but of the need to convert newer local figures into outdated original quotas.⁶²

The Hung-wu Land Survey

The name “fish-scale records” (*yü-lin ts'ê*),⁶³ which was used throughout Ming times for cadastral records, describes the maps accompanying land-holding survey records. As schematically drawn on the maps, the boundaries of the many small plots had the appearance of scales on a fish. The term was already in use in the Sung dynasty as early as 1190; records compiled then continued to be used, updated or not, throughout the Yüan and into the Ming. The owners of registered plots all received certificates of ownership. One of the places where the fish-scale registers had been most regularly up-dated was Wu-chou (Chin-hua in Ming times) in northern Chekiang, where, in 1359, Chu Yüan-chang had assembled a group of advisors with whom he commenced long-range planning for the governance of the regime he was then creating.⁶⁴ It is likely that he became interested in the fish-scale registers as a tool of government at that time.⁶⁵ In 1368, particularly in order to combat the abuses called *kuai-chi* (false registration), a well-directed survey was conducted in western Chekiang using the presumably incorruptible students from the National Academy. Most official records seem to imply that this survey was empire-wide, but that is certainly untrue; and Hung-wu reign period cultivated area figures are

61 Kawakatsu Mamoru, *Chūgoku hōken kokka no shihai kōzō – Min-Shin fukei seidoshi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1980), p. 290, n. 50, is correct in charging Ho Ping-ti with error in this regard.

62 See Mori Masao, “Jūroku seiki Taiko shūhen chitai ni okeru kanden seido no kaikaku,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 21, No. 4 (March 1963), pp. 58–92; 22, No. 1 (July 1963), pp. 67–87; and Mori Masao, *Mindai Kōnan tochi seido no kenkyū*, Tōyōshi kenkyū sōkan (Kyoto, 1988), esp. ch. 5.

63 Other names are frequent. A particularly revealing one is *ti-mutso-lo ts'ê* (location of land registers); see Li Lung-ch'ien, *Ming-Ch'ing ching-chi shih* (Kuang-chou, 1988), p. 64.

64 For an overview, see also T'ang Wen-chi, *Ming-tai fu-i chih-tu shih*, pp. 9–12.

65 See, among others, Tsurumi Naohiro, “Mindai ni okeru kyōson shihai,” in *Higasbi Ajia sekai no tenkai II*, Iwanami kōza Sekai rekishi 12: Chūsei 6 (Tōkyō, 1971), pp. 57–92, trans. as “Rural control in the Ming dynasty,” trans. Timothy Brook and James Cole, in *State and society in China – Japanese perspectives on Ming–Qing social and economic history*, eds. Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 245–77; Nishimura Genshō, “Chō Kyōsei no tochi jōryō – zentaizō to rekishiteki igi haaku no tame ni,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 30, No. 1 (March 1971), pp. 33–61; 30, Nos. 2–3 (December 1971), pp. 214–41; Ho Ping-ti, “Nan-Sung chih chin t'u-ti shu-tzu ti k'ao-shih ho p'ing-chia,” *Chung-kuo she-hui k'o-hsueh*, 2 (1981), pp. 133–65; 3 (1981), pp. 25–147.

consequently generally less reliable than the population figures.⁶⁶ However, according to some later records a national “survey” was ordered in 1387 that at least resulted in the government obtaining figures of varying reliability for the entire country.⁶⁷

Locally, such figures were often based on Sung and Yüan period data, but in many cases they show cultivated area figures considerably lower than Sung figures. These discrepancies have puzzled scholars. On closer inspection, however, the cultivated area figures that are lower than those for Sung are not seen as resulting from Ming under-registration so much as from different principles governing what to include. The Sung figures in many cases are very high – even higher than those for the 1930s – and include much uncultivable mountainous land, whether this is explicitly stated or not.

The scholar-official, Huo T’ao (1487–1540)⁶⁸ stated that general under-registration and the removal from the registers of land added to princely estates together with clerical errors had decreased the taxable land in the empire from 8.5 million to 4.3 million *ch’ing* (one *ch’ing* equals hundred *mu*). These figures have since been quoted repeatedly to show the precariousness of the Ming state. In the 1940s, Fujii Hiroshi published a detailed analysis of 200 sets of local figures from gazetteers, reaching some definite conclusions about Ming land registration that are not as widely used as they should be.⁶⁹ The high figure of 8.5 million *ch’ing* under cultivation turns out to be based on some obvious but nonetheless generally overlooked mistakes in recording. One such recording error in the figures for Hu-kuang alone accounts for 2 million *ch’ing* (increasing Hu-kuang’s data by a factor of ten!), and one in Honan for more than a million! Later Ming official compilations such as the Wan-li period *Ta Ming Hui-tien* (*Collected statutes of the Ming dynasty*) perpetuated the errors by uncritically copying

66 Some Ming local gazetteers have complicated the picture by assuming that early Hung-wu figures available to their authors were necessarily referring to 1368.

67 According to Huang Tso, comp., *Nan-yung chih* (*Account of the National University in Nanking*), (1544); see Ho, “Nan-Sung chih chin.”

68 See his biography in *Dictionary of Ming biography, 1368–1644*, eds. L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang (New York, 1976), Vol. 1, pp. 679–83.

69 Fujii Hiroshi, “Mindai dendo tōkei ni kansuru ichi,” *Tōyō gakubō*, 30, No. 3 (August 1943) pp. 90–123; 30, No. 4 (August 1944), pp. 60–87; 31, No. 1 (February 1947), pp. 97–134. Dwight Perkins and his then assistant, Wang Yeh-chien, are among the very few not only to have cited the articles, but to have actually used these inescapable conclusions: Dwight H. Perkins, (with the assistance of Yeh-chien Wang (Wang Yejian), Kuo-ying Wang Hsiao, and Yung-ming Su), *Agricultural development in China 1368–1968* (Chicago, 1969). On the other hand, Li Lung-ch’ien even concludes from the fictitiously high figure of 8 million *ch’ing* that the Hung-wu survey *therefore* has to have been reliable and empire-wide! See Li Lung-ch’ien, *Ming–Ch’ing ching-chi shih*.

these provincial figures for 1393 and extrapolating other figures from them.⁷⁰

Comparisons with local gazetteers and the tax quotas fixed in the Hung-wu period should lead us to follow Fujii in assuming that, whatever their relation to reality, the figures reported in the *shih-lu* (*Veritable records*) — 3.9 million *ch'ing* for 1391 — were the figures actually used by the government. On this basis, one has to conclude that the decrease in the cultivated area controlled by the state so deplored by Huo T'ao and so often understood by modern Chinese Marxists as resulting from brutal exploitation is a myth.⁷¹ This figure tallies well with more detailed data reported for about 1500 in the *T'u-shu pien* (*Atlas and encyclopaedia*), compiled by Chang Huang (1527–1608),⁷² which shows only a slight increase in cultivated area before the sixteenth-century land surveys. It is, therefore, best to use the cultivated area distribution that can be obtained from these figures for 1400,⁷³ even though it does not reflect real growth.

Surveys from Hung-wu to Chang Chü-cheng

Officially, the government continued using the original Hung-wu period tax quotas, while exempting from taxation all newly reclaimed land.⁷⁴ The need to make adjustments, however, seems to have become inescapable after the 1520s. The kinds of illegal abuses listed previously reached the breaking point in both the North and the South, albeit for different reasons. In the North, the festering problems resulting from applying the “great *mu*” among original local landholders and the “small *mu*” among the early offi-

70 Recent scholars such as Kang Chao and Fan Shu-chih, even when aware of the grosser errors, have made incorrect inferences in attempting to correct them. See Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo ching-chi chih-tu shih lun*, ch. 2, and Fan Shu-chih, “Wan-li ch'ing-chang shu-lun — chien lun Ming-tai keng-ti mien-chih t'ung-chi,” *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih yen-chiu*, 2 (1984), pp. 25–37. They have used other wrongly based data from the *Chu-ssu chih-chang* (*Rules for administrators*), ostensibly dating from the Hung-wu period. Note that the actual tax collection figures are *not* based on the wrongly copied land data. As for the *Ta-Minghui-tien*, there are two versions readily available: the Cheng-te edition of 1509 was edited by a group under Li Tung-yang, and is rpt. as Li Tung-yang et al. (intr. by Yamane Yukio), *Seitoku Dai-Min ten*, 3 vols. (Tokyo, 1989). This edition had been revised in 1578, and one current reprint is Li Tung-yang, rev. by Shen Shih-hsing et al., *Ta-Ming hui-tien*, 5 vols. (T'ai-pei, 1976).

71 One should also be urged to use these figures to reassess many other arguments based upon the acceptance of the 8.5 million *ch'ing* figure, are present *in passim* in Huang, Ray, *Taxation and governmental finance in sixteenth-century Ming China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

72 Biography in *DMB*, pp. 83–85.

73 The odd figure is Ho-nan, for which we luckily have a corrected gazetteer figure for 1411.

74 This exemption might originally have been locally limited to the Northern Metropolitan Region, Ho-nan and Shantung and have ceased to exist in the Hsüan-te, or perhaps Chia-ching period. See Fujii, “Mindai dendo tōkei,” 1: p. 115, n. 15. In other cases, there was a limit of three years. There are several records indicating that landowners of new reclaimed areas were quite happy to pay low taxes on their land, for registration would mean official ownership and hence security against encroachment.

cially resettled immigrants led to demands for a new total survey that would employ one consistent *mu* locally to measure land in order to make taxes and corvée payments more equitable.⁷⁵ Such surveys should, it was expected, include newly reclaimed land and the land of unofficial immigrants who had arrived later.⁷⁶

The famous official, Kuei O (*chin-shih* of 1511, d. 1531),⁷⁷ while serving in Ch'eng-an county of the Northern Metropolitan Region, initiated a new *che-mu* (*mu* conversion) registration method in 1522, in which the increased number of actual *mu* in cultivation was converted into the fixed number of *mu* in the original tax quota. Soil fertility and other criteria in use for classifying land were taken into account so that a certain number of actual *mu* of a given category were considered equivalent to one "official" *mu* for tax purposes. This made calculation of tax rates for landowners much simpler, since it was no longer necessary to apply different rates to different classes of land: these differences were already taken into account when registering the official size of a plot. The terms "small *mu*" and "great *mu*" henceforth came to be used to differentiate actual from official *mu*. Areas that came to use this new method extended from Shantung, Shensi, and Honan in the North to Kiangsi, Anhwei, and Kwangtung in the South.⁷⁸ The government encouraged the practice at times and at other times forbade it on the grounds that the work it involved would fall into the hands of the county magistracy clerks, a group the scholar-officials always suspected of being susceptible to "corruption."

At the same time, the central administration promoted other corrective measures. There was some resistance to these new surveys, but it was not simply a matter of great landholders fearing tax increases once the true circumstances of their landholdings became known. Rather, as with any change in a system of taxation, some owners were favored while others suffered, despite an overall increase in fairness. A generally noted consequence of the new surveys was that, after a short hiatus, land prices rose and market activity grew, occurrences that show that in the land market, at least, the new system of tax allocation was found to be an improvement.⁷⁹ As a result of these surveys,

75 See Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokoku no shibai kōzō*, ch. 2.

76 See Nishimura Genshō, "Min kōki no jōryō ni tsuite," *Shirin*, 54, No. 5 (September 1971), pp. 1-52.

77 Biography in *DMB*, pp. 756-59.

78 Nishimura has made a table showing all the kinds of new surveys carried out up to the 1580s; see "Min kōki no jōryō." Some of the new surveys were in fact somewhat later and were carried out in conjunction with the Chang Chū-cheng survey, for which, see below. Using the standard *mu*, the new actual local figures might be anywhere from 1.8 to 8.1 times the original amount depending on the category. Paddies and dry land, which constituted by far the largest part of the overall amount, were generally closest to the official figures.

79 Nishimura, "Min kōki no jōryō."

many places prepared new fish-scale registers, sometimes for the first time.⁸⁰ In addition, a certificate of ownership was to accompany every subsequent land transaction. Another by-product of the process was the so-called *kuai-hu-ts'e* ([land] registers, listed household by household). In these registers, all land plots owned by one household were listed together.⁸¹ They replaced the yellow registers (*huang ts'e*) — the population registers that were no longer usable for reasons previously explained. Much of the confusion concerning land-ownership was cleared up by these surveys.

The Chang Chü-cheng survey

In 1581, Chang Chü-cheng (1525–82),⁸² the great chief minister of the early Wan-li reign, ordered that a nationwide survey be undertaken and rigorously carried out. It has become usual for twentieth-century scholars to regard this survey as insignificant. The opinions of Shimizu Taiji, Ho Ping-ti, and Ray Huang are typical. They contend that because the survey was never completed, it therefore had no practical importance. As stated above, this view has long been demonstrated by Fujii Hiroshi to be incorrect. More recently, a small group of Chinese and Japanese historians have begun to reassess the survey as being of great historical importance, and as a valuable source of important data.⁸³ It could be described as the first nationwide survey since Sung times, and it was not surpassed in coverage and quality of detail until modern times.⁸⁴ The fish-scale registers for most regions of China were either made for the first time or up-dated. In fact, Tsurumi Naohiro has shown that all extant Ming and Ch'ing cadasters go back to 1581 or 1582 rather than to the Hung-wu period.⁸⁵ The cadasters still extant that resulted from the survey contain what other documentary sources lead us to believe should be indicated by them: designations of plots; area calculations (there are even separate calculation books extant); land ownership; tenancy; a drawing showing the mostly very small plots; and often some as yet unexplained features of mountain plots, which probably relate to communal or shared ownership. There is, however, a surprising lack of actual tax data in many of the cadasters.

80 See also Nishimura, "Chō Kyōsei no tochi jōryō."

81 An early example is Ch'ang-shu county (in the Chiang-nan region) in 1538. See Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokkei no shibai kōzō*, p. 257.

82 See biography in DMB, pp. 53–61.

83 Nishimura, "Chō Kyōsei no tochi jōryō;" Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokkei no shibai kōzō*, ch. 4; Fan, "Wan-li ch'ing-chang;" and Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo ching-chi chih-tu shih lun*.

84 This is contrary to the opinion of Ho, *Studies on the population*, and Ho, "Nan-Sung chih chin," who seems to ignore the number of tax compilations, late Ming or Ch'ing, which were based upon this survey; for example, the *Chiang-hsi fu-i ch'üan-shu* (*The complete tax and corvée data of Chiang-hsi*).

85 For an overview, see Tsurumi Naohiro, "Gyorinsatsu o tazunete — Chūgoku kenshū no tabi," *Kindai Chūgoku kenkyū ibō*, 6 (March 1984), pp. 30–68, and the many other articles on the *yü-lin-ts'e* by this author cited in n. 166. See also Li Lung-ch'ien, *Ming-Ch'ing ching-chi shih*, pp. 181–82.

It appears that the primary focus of the survey was the layout of the land itself and not taxes *per se*, although detailed landholding maps do occur.

After some local try-outs, the nationwide survey was announced on 16 December 1580, less than two years before Chang's death. The reasons officially given for instituting the new general cadastral survey were the arrearage in official tax remittances (which were always lower than the assessed amounts) and a displeasure with the increasingly common practice of multiple ownership of land under which tax obligations might be assumed by middlemen rather than the actual owners or cultivators of the taxed land.

Landowners were required to announce the survey and to measure their holdings together with their tenants, if any, and new deeds were to be issued. Tenants would then be able to pay rents according to the amount of land officially entered in the owners' names on the tax registers – a procedure that assured mutual surveillance. Many specialist clerks were employed in the survey and were paid out of taxes ordered a few years earlier to be retained locally. In the beginning, new surveys were sometimes performed too quickly, and there was good reason to believe that some reported results were false, but heavy punishments were soon imposed to remedy these problems. Measures were also taken to ensure that clerks did not have too much power and discretion; their names were recorded in the registers as a means of making them responsible for their work. Using the standardized definition of 240 square *pu* (paces) to equal one “real” *mu*, land register conversion now spread widely. Dry or mountain land that had been converted into paddies or ponds that had been converted into fields were re-entered in the registers under more highly taxed categories. The surveys for the most part showed large increases in cultivated area, although occasionally lower figures resulted from the new surveys, possibly because of the use of the new standards of measurement or as a result of correcting what had originally been incorrect figures.

While there were occasional inconsistencies and problems of the sort that attend cadastral surveys anywhere in the world, by extending to the entire nation the new surveys begun in the 1520s, much of positive value was accomplished: many reliable cadasters – “actual tax and corvée” books – were created, and deeds were issued.

Moreover, the historical importance of this survey is further enhanced by the fact that all Ch'ing data ultimately go back to it, with some adjustments and remissions granted to compensate for damages dating from the mid-seventeenth-century wars. Unfortunately, most of Chang Chü-cheng's policies were rescinded within a year of his death. As a result of this rescission and of the fact that the new figures did not have to be reported to the central government because the stated goal of the survey was not to increase the tax quotas, there are now to be found only some provincially aggregated and

some localized data that stem from this survey. However, our lack of county-level figures on cultivated area nationwide for the Ming does not mean these figures were not available to, and useful for, officials and local populations of the Ming.

Estimates of the area under cultivation

As has been indicated, there are probably no better data for 1400 than the figures on cultivated land that are offered in the *T'u-shu-pien* (*Atlas and Encyclopaedia*). For 1578, the pre-Chang Chü-cheng data as they have been preserved in the Wan-li edition of the *Ta-Ming hui-tien* (*Collected statutes of the Ming dynasty*), are available, subject to the kinds of reevaluations discussed previously. As for the new Chang Chü-cheng survey data from 1581, the resulting increases or decreases in cultivated land are known for every province. For some provinces, an "old" figure also exists along with the new total. There is a problem with these "old" figures, however. They often do not tally with any of the earlier figures that are known. The "old" figures might therefore denote new re-measurements, standardized by the use of the newly adopted "small *mu*," of land taxable since olden times. Alternatively, these figures might be the "real" figures that existed locally and that resulted from the many new surveys carried out from the 1520s on, but not officially adopted and, hence, omitted from the 1578 *Hui-tien*.⁸⁶

Using as a measure the provincial distributions of taxed land area in 1600 as extrapolated linearly from the 1400 and the 1766 data on land area and relating these figures to the seemingly most reliable provincial 1581/2 figures on cultivated land area, we can arrive at the estimates for the area under cultivation given in Tables 9.3 and 9.4.⁸⁷ The rates of cultivated land per person obtained by comparing these figures with the earlier population estimates, are given in Table 9.5.

The information in the tables seems to indicate that the great differences between the North and the South of China in the ratios of persons to *mu* of land under cultivation in the beginning of the Ming dynasty became smaller

86 On the national level, we unfortunately do *not* have aggregated data; in many cases, we only have statements like "increased by so many *ch'ing*". This makes it imperative to use the best older data, something Kang Chao in Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo ching-chi chih-tu shih lun*, and Fan in his "Wan-li ch'ing-chang" have not done: they use the mistaken so-called "Hung-wu" figures from the *Ta Ming hui-tien*. My personal explanation for the terms "old" and "new" as used here is, tentatively, that "old" refers to all land already on the records, but often re-measured; and that "new" includes, in addition, all newly registered land. Such an explanation would allow for the fact that many "old" figures exceed any earlier figure available.

87 I have here used extrapolations derived by comparing figures from those provinces for which we have more or less reliable aggregated data with the estimated percentage of the total cultivated area these provinces would contain on the basis of figures in early Ming and mid-Ch'ing sources. Other provinces' data are derived accordingly.

TABLE 9.3
Early available data on cultivated area, Ming China (units '000)

Province	Areage according to the "Chu-ssu chih-chang"	Areage according to the "T'u-shu-pien"	% according to the "T'u-shu-pien"	Wan-li area according to the "Ta-Ming hui-tien" (1578)
<i>Nan Chih-li</i>	810.2	696.7	16.23	773.9
<i>Pei Chih-li</i>	269.7	274.0	6.23	492.6
<i>Chekiang</i>	517.1	472.9	11.04	467.0
<i>Kiangsi</i>	431.2	402.5	9.38	401.2
<i>Hu-kuang</i>	209.0	209.0	4.87	236.1
<i>Shantung</i>	724.0	555.9	12.95	617.5
<i>Fukien</i>	146.3	135.3	3.15	134.2
<i>Shansi</i>	418.6	391.6	9.12	368.0
<i>Honan</i>	416.1	416.3	9.70	741.6
<i>Shensi and Kan-su</i>	315.3	263.7	6.14	292.9
<i>Szechwan and Kweichow</i>	112.0	107.9	2.51	140.0
<i>Kwangtung</i>	237.3	255.8	5.96	256.9
<i>Kwangsi</i>	102.4	92.5	2.15	94.0
<i>Yunnan</i>	No Fig	17.3	0.40	18.0
Total	4709.2	4292.4	100.0	5033.9

Source: The "Chu-ssu chih-chang" data come from table i 30 in Liang Fang-chung "Chung-kuo li-tai hu-k'ou", except *Nan Chih-li*, *Pei Chih-li*, *Ho-nan* (all replaced by the 1502 figure) and *Hu-kuang* (repl. by the "T'u-shu-pien" figure). The "T'u-shu-pien" data come from table i 31 in Liang Fang-chung "Chung-kuo li-tai hu-

as time went on. The actual population pressure on the land already seems to have been acute in those regions where the T'ai-p'ing rebellion was to occur in the mid-nineteenth century: the devastation wrought by that rebellion makes the late nineteenth data there less comparable with Ming and early Ch'ing conditions. Clearly, China was already relatively heavily populated by late Ming times. The figures on average land per person clearly confirm this. Kang Chao has given 5.45 *mu* per person for 1109, and 3.96 for 1748. The figures we are using indicate a ratio of 5.0 *mu* per person in 1400, and some figure between 4.1 and 3.2 *mu* per person already as early as 1600. Ts'ung Han-hsiang does not exaggerate in stating that there already was a large population pressure in the early Ming in Chiang-nan that resulted in the intensification and diversification of agriculture.⁸⁸ While the estimates proposed here are based on better data than previous ones, they remain quite tentative. Far-reaching extrapolations from them are not advisable. Furthermore, to make an analysis of the population pressure on the land, raw population and land data must be supplemented with information on

88 See Ts'ung Han-hsiang, "Lun Ming-tai Chiang-nan ti-ch'ü ti jen-k'ou mi-chi ch'ü tui ching-chi fa-chan ti ying-hsiang," *Chung-kuo shih-yen-chiu*, 3 (1984), pp. 41-54. "Intensification" refers to increased labor input per area, and "diversification" to the adoption of a more varied array of crops, especially cash crops, so that the output (monetary) value per area increases.

TABLE 9.4
Cultivated area "guesstimates" for late Ming China (units' 000) ching

Province	"Old" figures acc. to the "Shih-lu"	Additions acc. to the "Shih-lu"	Acreage around 1580	Acreage data from 1812	% in 1812	Estimated % around 1600	Revised acreage data around 1600
<i>Nan Chih-li</i>		41.0	814.9	1135.3	14.80	15.51	1445.4
<i>Pei Chih-li</i>		33.0	525.6	741.4	9.66	8.02	747.5
<i>Chekiang</i>		45.9	512.9	465.0	6.06	8.55	796.6
<i>Kiangsi</i>		61.5	462.7	472.7	6.16	7.77	723.8
<i>Hu-kuang</i>	364.4	542.3	906.7	921.0	12.00	8.44	786.0
<i>Shantung</i>	800.8	365.8	1166.6	986.3	12.86	12.90	1202.2
<i>Fukien</i>			134.2	136.5	1.78	2.47	229.7
<i>Shensi</i>		22.5	390.5	552.8	7.21	8.16	760.6
<i>Honan</i>	1007.3	44.4	1051.7	721.1	9.40	9.55	889.6
<i>Shensi and Kan-su</i>	472.6	31.0	503.6	543.6	7.09	6.61	616.2
<i>Szechwan and Kweichow</i>		275.6	415.6	493.2	6.43	4.47	416.6
<i>Kwangtung</i>	266.4	71.2	337.6	320.3	4.17	5.07	472.1
<i>Kwangsi</i>		0.8	94.8	90.0	1.17	1.66	155.0
<i>Yunnan</i>			18.0	93.2	1.21	0.81	75.4
Total	2911.5	1535.0	7335.4	7672.4	100.00	100.00	9316.9
<i>Considered relatively reliable provinces</i>			3966.2	3492.3	45.5	42.57	3966.2

Source: For the "Shih-lu" data, see table 2.6 in Chao Kang et al. "Chung-kuo t'u-ti chih-tu shih"; totals are mine. The 1812 data come from table 161 in Liang Fang-chung "chung-kuo li-tai hu-k'ou". The estimated % around 1600 is computed on bases of the "T'u-shu-pien" ("1400") and the 1812 ("1800") data.

TABLE 9.5
Estimates of cultivated area per person in Ming China (units, mu/person)

Province	1400	1600 (Hyp. A)	1600 (Hyp. B)	1936	Av. annual change 1400-1600 (Hyp. A) (i)	(Hyp. B) (ii)	Av. annual change 1600-1925 (Hyp. A) (iii)	(Hyp. B) (iv)	(i)-(iii) (Hyp. A)	(ii)-(iv) (Hyp. B)
<i>Nan Chih-li</i>	6.5	3.3	2.6	3.8-2.5	-0.33	-0.45	-0.02	0.05	-0.32	-0.50
<i>Pei Chih-li</i>	14.2	5.9	4.6	4.2	-0.44	-0.56	-0.10	-0.03	-0.34	-0.53
<i>Chekiang</i>	4.5	2.9	2.3	3.7	-0.23	-0.35	0.08	0.15	-0.31	-0.50
<i>Kiangsi</i>	4.5	3.0	2.4	3.5	-0.20	-0.32	0.05	0.12	-0.25	-0.43
<i>Hu-kuang</i>	4.4	3.3	2.6	2.7-2.5	-0.15	-0.26	-0.07	0.00	-0.07	-0.26
<i>Shantung</i>	10.6	6.3	5.0	3.7	-0.26	-0.38	-0.16	-0.09	-0.10	-0.29
<i>Fukien</i>	3.5	1.9	1.5	2.4	-0.30	-0.41	0.07	0.14	-0.37	-0.56
<i>Shansi</i>	9.6	6.3	5.0	7.4	-0.21	-0.33	0.05	0.12	-0.26	-0.45
<i>Honan</i>	21.8	8.0	6.4	4.2	-0.50	-0.61	-0.20	-0.13	-0.30	-0.49
<i>Shensi and Kan-su</i>	11.4	4.9	3.9	5.0-5.4	-0.42	-0.54	0.02	0.09	-0.44	-0.63
<i>Szechwan and Kweichow</i>	7.4	3.6	2.9	2.8	-0.35	-0.47	-0.08	-0.01	-0.27	-0.46
<i>Kwangtung</i>	8.5	4.0	3.2	1.1	-0.38	-0.49	-0.40	-0.32	0.02	-0.17
<i>Kwangsi</i>	6.2	3.0	2.4	2.8	-0.36	-0.48	-0.02	0.05	-0.34	-0.53
<i>Yunnan</i>	6.7	3.3	2.6	2.8	-0.36	-0.47	-0.05	0.02	-0.31	-0.50
Total	5.0	4.1	3.2		-0.11	-0.23			-3.67	-6.28

Note: the total difference between (negative) annual growth between 1400-1600 and 1600-1925 is lowest in the case of Hyp. A.

Source: Calculated from data in tables 9.1-9.4 above.

the distribution of agricultural surpluses, on prices of produce, and on increases in land productivity – all factors that are difficult to measure. It might be argued that 2.9 *mu* per person in Chekiang in 1600 could support a better life than 4.5 *mu* in 1400, but that cannot really be determined and depends as well on price changes among many other factors.⁸⁹ The historical study of commodity prices during the Ming period is still in its infancy and may never mature.

Prices and money

Price levels are one of the indices most often used to gauge economic activities, but price history only reveals its full meaning when placed in the overall economic context. Price levels alone, considered in isolation from other economic factors, tell us little. Prices, after all, reflect in some measure the amount of precious metals available: if more precious metal becomes available, prices will rise even if (though it would rarely be the case) no other economic changes occur. Food prices also will rise temporarily when harvests are bad, or chronically when the person per land ratio worsens without a rise in productivity. Such factors have different results for different activities and groups in a society.

It is certain, however, that the old monetarist viewpoint, which saw the vigorous economy of sixteenth-century Europe as resulting solely from the enormous influx of American silver and which saw the depression of the late seventeenth century as a response to the decline of that influx, has been abandoned. Other factors such as wars, famines, the availability of credit facilities, and the size of harvests have turned out to be at least as important as the influx of silver.⁹⁰ First, the relationship of the supply of precious metal to money and second, that of the money supply to prices has to be investigated much more carefully and empirically than earlier theories presupposed.⁹¹ The

89 Using a very imprecise method, Dwight Perkins has roughly calculated land productivity from his sets of population and cultivated area estimates. However, to be able to do that, he *assumes* a constant agricultural production per capita, which any historian who is interested in the actual *curves* of economic life cannot do. Moreover, such an assumption is directly contradicted by the decrease in life expectancy in the period and indirectly by all literary data, which see economic upswings in some and recessions in other periods. Of course, our own population and acreage estimates, which are derived linearly, also should be revised when (or if) better curves become available, since they as well are related to general economic conjunctures.

90 See the studies by Michel Morineau, as, for example, Michel Morineau, *Incroyables gazettes et fabuleux métaux – les retours des trésors américains d'après les gazettes hollandaises (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles)*, Studies in modern capitalism/Études sur le capitalisme moderne (London and Paris, 1985), and his “D’Amsterdam Séville: de quelle réalité l’histoire des prix est-elle le miroir?,” *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 23, No. 1 (January–February 1968), pp. 178–205.

91 The so-called Hamilton hypothesis, after Earl J. Hamilton, *American treasure and the price revolution in Spain, 1501–1650* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934).

greatly increased stock of money could buy less at the end of the century than the smaller stock could buy at the beginning.⁹²

These introductory remarks are important if we want to assess the recent looks at China's part in a worldwide silver network from the mid-sixteenth century onward. Indeed, silver imports and the vicissitudes involved with these imports cannot be minimized. Between 1540 and 1600 the annual imports of silver into China rose from 40,000 kilograms to at least 150,000 kilograms and greatly exceeded domestic production of silver. Certainly, economic exchange was facilitated by those imports, otherwise they would not have even taken place. However, to see the amounts and cycles of silver imports as the direct cause of the cycles of economic activity is an error as the European case has shown.

Moreover, we lack general economic data that are even remotely comparable to European (or for that matter to Japanese) price series, and in view of the objections mentioned, we cannot uncritically use silver imports, or silver receipts at the central government's T'ai-ts'ang vault as a substitute for the information that is lacking.⁹³

The phenomenon of rising food prices when harvests are bad is not in itself surprising; nor is the less-well known fact that cotton prices fall at the same time. These phenomena do suggest, however, that several major findings of the socio-economic historians of Europe apply to China as well, such as the fact that harvest fluctuations have the dominant effect on prices in the short run and the validity of the pre-modern economic scissors model.⁹⁴ The few economic data we have on rice production or on the state's silver receipts and similar items must be put into this kind of a general economic and social context before they can acquire meaning. The lack of data makes such a task difficult, but it is the only possible way to deal with the problem.

We can give only an outline of the still sketchy material about the money supply. At the beginning of the dynasty, the Hung-wu emperor tried to enforce a paper money system, but the paper bills were neither exchangeable for nor backed by silver. In order to ensure their circulation, the use of both

92 Some examples of this phenomenon are given for Peking in James Geiss, "Peking under the Ming (1368-1644)" (Diss., Princeton University, 1979).

93 For more information, see William S. Atwell, "International bullion flows and the Chinese economy circa 1530-1650," *Past and Present*, 95 (May 1982), pp. 68-90; his chapter, "Ming China and the emerging world economy," in this volume; Frederic E. Wakeman Jr., "China and the seventeenth-century crisis," *Late Imperial China*, 7, No. 1 (June 1986), pp. 1-26; and Wakeman's, *The great enterprise*, pp. 1-8.

94 In this case, when the inelastic demand for food causes a rising demand for money because of high food prices, the money supply for elastic demand products decreases; and these factors are more important in the short run than the hypothetical equation according to which money supply directly and uniformly relates to price levels.

copper cash and silver bullion was forbidden. For the same reason, the tax system, although basically committed to payment in kind, sometimes allowed the substitution of copper and silver in tax payments while discouraging the use of paper, in order to remove copper and silver from circulation. Paper money was printed in large quantities.⁹⁵ Copper coins (cash) were in short supply, since the mines in Kwangtung and Kwangsi that in Sung times had provided 95 percent of the supply were exhausted.⁹⁶ The shortage made copper cash rarer and hence overvalued.⁹⁷

The excessive printing of paper money is usually seen as the cause of its loss of credibility with the public. If it had been used conscientiously, however, there was no reason why paper money could not have replaced copper and silver. At certain points, for example around 1425, the government seems to have been on the verge of making the system work by such means as allowing 70 percent of the commercial taxes to be paid in paper money and 30 percent in copper coins.

There were, however, some major contradictions in the monetary structure. Salaries of officials and soldiers were paid in paper money, the amounts of which were not indexed to price levels. Rising prices, while not necessarily economically disruptive (quite the contrary), were therefore not helpful to the officials, the implementers of the paper currency policy.⁹⁸ In 1433, partial tax payments in silver, which was less subject to inflation than paper money, began to be allowed; and in 1436 payment in silver was more generally extended to tax grain and to the levies-in-lieu-of-tax that were paid by miners and artisans. None of these permissions, however, signify that the government was trying to replace its ideal of a government-regulated paper money system with a silver standard.

Officials and large-scale merchants such as those who participated in the *k'ai-chung fa* (salt barter method) trade with the northern frontier (see below) found the use of silver helpful because a small amount had a high value. A large sum was far more easily transported as silver than as copper and was therefore more useful for making large transactions. Yet, silver was not regu-

95 For example, the actual increase in money supply in 1390 was 75 million *kuan*. A bill in the denomination of one *kuan* or "string" was, in theory, equivalent to one string of 1,000 copper cash. Its market value in 1390 was about 4 *kuan* for one picul of rice. See Huang, *Taxation*, pp. 69–70.

96 Bernd Eberstein, *Bergbau und Bergarbeiter zur Ming-Zeit (1368–1644)*, Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, Band 57 (Hamburg, 1957).

97 A one-*kuan* paper note decreased in value to 160 copper coins.

98 The historian, Li Chien-nung, remarked that regular redemption payments for crimes also were not indexed, allowing criminals to profit from the failure to adjust the currency. See Li Chien-nung, "Ming-tai ti i ko kuan-ting wu-chia piao-tien pu-huan chih-pi," *She-hui k'o-hsueh chi-k'an*, Wu-han ta-hsueh, 1 (1930), pp. 501–26, trans. as "Price control and paper currency in Ming." In *Chinese social history in translations of selected studies*, eds. E-tu Zen (Jen I-tu) Sun and John deFrancis. American Council of Learned Societies – Studies in Chinese and Related Civilizations, No. 7 (1957), pp. 281–97.

larly used in day-to-day transactions because there was not enough of it, and for a long time it was too valuable to be used to purchase low-priced items. Also, it was not currency in the strict sense. It was not minted and, therefore, even more than in the West, it remained a commodity among other commodities; whether to mine more of it was a decision subject to the overall market conditions. Although it has not yet been properly investigated, it seems logical to assume that the increased but limited use of silver⁹⁹ adversely affected the circulation of paper money.

Commutation of taxes from payment in kind to payment in money came first with the shift from service to payment for *corvée* during the 1450s. At that time, the use of copper cash was specified. Not until the 1520s would silver be used at the lowest levels of tax collection.

As copper and silver basically were used in different sectors and at different levels of the economy, a change in the demand for or the supply of copper did not necessarily mean a change in the demand for or the supply of silver. When comparing prices culled from different sources, it therefore becomes necessary (though not always possible) for contemporary historians to determine whether a price was stated and paid in silver or stated in silver and paid in copper (and then whether the price was calculated at the official rate or at the market rate) or stated and presumably paid in copper. With the increased imports of silver, especially after the opening of the Potosí mines, silver as a medium of economic exchange might very well have made inroads into sectors that formerly had used copper, paper money, cloth, or barter. Taking into account all the changes in the modes of tax collection, the point must be made that the curve that indicates how much silver was received by the government at the T'ai-ts'ang Vault at various times (with its peaks in 1570 and 1621 and its low point in 1590) cannot be considered as even an approximate indicator of what the overall economic conditions were at those times.

In general, it can be said that silver came to constitute an ever-increasing part of government revenues and that it slowly displaced taxes in kind. Government income in silver in 1631 was twice that of 1618 and, in 1642, it was twice that of 1631. For what it is worth, there is a curious estimate of the total silver supply at the end of the Ming: Chiang Ch'en, a lowly late Ming Office Manager of the Ministry of Revenue, estimates it

99 Hamaguchi takes 0.1 *tael* as a dividing point; for prices higher than this, silver came to be used. See Hamaguchi Fukuju, "Mindai ginnō hihan ronkō." In *Kimura Masao sensei taikan kinen Tōyōshi ronshū*, ed. Kimura Masao sensei taikan kinen jigyōkai Tōyōshi ronshū henshū iinkai (Chōfu, 1976), pp. 279–88. Also see his "Ryūkei Banreki no senpō no shintenkaï," *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 31, No. 3 (December 1972), pp. 73–92.

to have been 250 million taels, including plate and jewelry.¹⁰⁰ Because there are no comparable figures for earlier periods, there is no way of knowing whether the supply of money kept up with the population growth or the price levels.

After all these caveats, it becomes even more unfortunate that we have hardly any information on the prices of various commodities for the Ming. Official price lists that unreasonably presumed fixed prices did exist, but only from 1570 on were they adjusted twice a year. Copies of almost none of those lists are extant, however, so we do not know what their value would have been; it might not be much, since the prices quoted could be those at which merchants had to sell to the government as part of their taxes.¹⁰¹ The prices given by P'eng Hsin-wei are most often used,¹⁰² but these come from impossibly disparate data and even the most gullible price historian should not put too much faith in them. On the basis of that evidence, Cartier has seen a steep rise in prices until 1400, a decline thereafter until 1430–50, a gradual recovery to 1500, and a high plateau maintained until 1610 that resulted in prices three or four times those of the early period.¹⁰³ Another price series for grain prices in the North sees continuously increasing prices, but the grain supply increasingly deteriorated there because of changes in the salt barter (*k'ai-chung-fa*) system and merchant colonies.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the only remark we can make is that there seems to be no general disjunction in the prices around the 1540s or the 1570s, when silver imports started to rise.¹⁰⁵

100 See Terada Takanobu, "Minmatsu ni okeru gin no ryūsūryō ni tsuite – aruiwa Shō Chin no chōhō ni tsuite." In *Tamura hakushi shōju Tōyōshi ronsō*, ed. Tamura hakushi taikan kinen jigyōkai (Kyoto, 1968), pp. 407–21. Ray Huang is surprised at this low figure, which must have been a brake on the late Ming economy; but we must keep in mind that Europe also always lacked enough money. See Huang Jen-yü (Ray Huang), "Ts'ung 'San-yen' k'an wan Ming shang-jen," *Hsiang-kuang Chung-wen ta-hsieh Chung-kuo wen-hua yen-chiu-so hsieh-pao*, 7, No. 1 (December 1974), p. 165, n. 291.

101 Li Chien-nung (price control) called the prices on one such list from 1578, which reflected the still limited copper and silver supplies, "unreasonably low."

102 P'eng Hsin-wei, *Chung-kuo huo-pi shih* (Shanghai, 1958), pp. 497–98. Another useful and impressive compilation of Ming prices is given in Huang Mien-t'ang, "Ming-tai wu-chia k'ao-lüeh," in his *Ming-shih kuan-chien* (Chi-nan, 1985), pp. 346–72. However, again, it is difficult to extrapolate actual trends.

103 See Michel Cartier, "Notes sur l'histoire des prix en Chine du XIV^e au XVII^e siècle," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 24, No. 4 (July–August 1969), pp. 876–79.

104 From 1440 to 1489, an average price of 0.49 *tael/tan*; 1.75 for 1490 to 1539; 2.66 for the period 1540–89, and 3.56 for 1590–1639. See Terada Takanobu, *Sansei shōnin no kenkyū – Mindai ni okeru shōnin oyobi shōgō shihon*, Tōyōshi kenkyū sōkan, 25 (Kyoto, 1972).

105 Huang, *Taxation*, sees, without too much evidence, stable prices during the sixteenth century, except for the 1570–80s. Rising prices thereafter were surely not only caused by military campaigns, as he maintained.

RURAL ADMINISTRATION: TAX COLLECTION AND THE RURAL
SOCIAL ORDER

Organizing the people

Introduction: the li-chia system

Aside from some very localized and individual impressions, only indirect information is available to aid in understanding rural society during the first century and a half of the Ming period. Most of the extant information available comes from the government and concerns systems of local control and taxation set up by the state and the gradual evolution of these systems. Here we shall concentrate, therefore, on the changes in the *li-chia* (administrative community) system, in the hope of using this system as an indirect index of change in the “real” society. However, if the problems encountered by the state in its system of rural control reveal changes in society, we must also recognize that the system itself exerted an influence on social developments and caused changes. Different social groups occupied different economic positions and experienced different fates *vis-à-vis* the system. The system also afforded varying types of opportunities that different socio-economic groups could use to take advantage of or to evade the governing institutions.

As is generally known, the administrative community (*li-chia*) system was the basic instrument for implementing the government’s relationship with rural society in Ming times. On paper, a *li* (community) consisted of 110 households. Responsible men from its ten most affluent households were designated as *li-chang* (community heads). The remaining 100 households were divided into ten *chia* (neighborhoods or sub-communities) containing ten households each. One community head was to serve each year, in rotation along with ten *chia-shou* (neighborhood heads) whose positions also rotated, until the entire rotation of both sets of heads was completed in a ten-year period.¹⁰⁶ As we shall see there was always a tension between the administrative community (*li*) as a real community and as an administrative unit.

The dynasty’s various official compendia of its institutions describe the administrative community (*li-chia*) structure incompletely and ambiguously. For example, it is not clear whether in any given year the annually rotating community head (*li-chang*) was to be assisted by one rotating head from each of the ten neighborhoods (*chia*) or by all ten households of one complete neighborhood (*chia*), which would, as a group, be replaced by another

¹⁰⁶ The term *chia-shou* seems to mean “neighborhood head” and, as such, might imply one *chia-shou* per *chia* per year, but there are also clear examples where *chia-shou* was used for all 100 households in all the ten *chia*, not only for those currently serving. In that sense, it was an equivalent for the term *hua-hu* (the various households).

neighborhood (*chia*) every year.¹⁰⁷ In other cases, it seems that a neighborhood (*chia*) was composed of eleven households, including one community head (*li-chang*) who would be directed by a neighborhood head (*chia-shou*) in the years he did not serve.¹⁰⁸ The actual mechanics of the system remain unclear at a number of such points, despite deceptively simple instructions in the government-sponsored compendia. Among recent scholars an array of social questions has been debated, two of which are: how did the system relate to society as a whole and what were its intended social objectives? In general, the debates are about whether the basic purpose of this administrative community (*li-chia*) system was to impose authoritarian control by intentionally by-passing or even uprooting pre-existing natural communities in rural society¹⁰⁹ or whether the system was fundamentally just a rationally structured mode of tax collection (tax in kind and corvée labor) and local justice that recognized and utilized this pre-existing social structure.¹¹⁰ It should also be noted that proper registration in the *li-chia* structure was necessary to have one's right of landownership officially recognized in court cases.

While great differences of opinion still exist, the conception of the system as a forced and completely artificial structure imposed on society from above has all but been abandoned. There is now a general convergence of opinion that, by virtue of the sheer incapacity of the government to impose by itself an arbitrary structure on the natural community scheme of things, the administrative community (*li-chia*) system converged with natural social

107 Such a distinction seems a trivial point in the cases where one *li* would be a large village (and in such a case the meaning of a *chia* could very well have changed from the first to the second situation), but it would not be so in the numerous cases where a *chia* would correspond to a hamlet: in those cases, it matters for supravillage relationships whether the *li-chang* was assisted by one hamlet and would oversee the other hamlets with it, or by one leader within each hamlet.

108 See the migrant stele mentioned in note 49. This factor is of importance in determining whether the *li-chang* formed a distinct status-based stratum or were hardly differentiated from the average villager.

109 Proponents of this view are Oyama Masaaki, "Fu-eki seido no henkaku," *Higashi Ajia sekai no tenkai II*, Iwanami kôza Sekai rekishi 12: Chûsei 6 (Tokyo, 1971), pp. 313–45; Oyama Masaaki, "Ajia no hōkensei — Chûgoku no hōkensei no mondai." In *Gendai rekishigaku no seika to kadai 2: Kyōdōtai, dorisei, bōkensei*, ed. Rekishigaku kenkyūkai (Tokyo, 1974), pp. 119–36; Oyama Masaaki, "Mindai Kahoku fu-eki seido kaikaku shi kenkyū no ichi kentō," *Tōyō bunka*, 37 (March 74), pp. 99–117; Wei, *Ming-tai huang-ts'z chih-tu*, and sometimes Kuribayashi Nobuo, *Rikōsei no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1971).

110 This is the so-called Japanese *kyōdōtai* debate, in which several different academic traditions all play their part. For some authors, a *kyōdōtai* community was seen as a "democratic," autonomous village full of mutual assistance and communal activities. For other authors, the actual *kyōdōtai* communities were, on the contrary, closed islands, maintained that way by the state in order to better exploit them, and constituted obstacles to modern development. Yet other post-war authors redefined the concept to include strong class divisions: customary cooperation took place under landlord or state leadership in order to keep peasants in a state of subjection.

Footnote continued on next page

units that were otherwise left alone by the state while being coopted to perform tax collection and other functions for it. As opposed to some earlier views, the administrative community (*li*) is nonetheless not to be seen as a fundamentally democratic local unit, for it was at heart a structure the purpose of which was to use local leaders to serve the government's interests and not the interests of the community's (*li*) members.¹¹¹ In short, there was no true "village democracy" in imperial China, although pre-existing villages still constituted the lowest building blocks of the state. Tsurumi Naohiro has aptly characterized the administrative community (*li-chia*) in saying that it functioned both as a system for tax collection and for rural control as well as for providing the necessary means of social reproduction (such as public services, mutual assistance and the like that enabled the community to maintain itself over time as a viable community) by using the social divisions that were already present.

There were several precursors of the Ming system. During the Yüan dynasty, in theory one *li-chang* (head of the *li*) was appointed for each *hsiang* (rural sub-county), and possibly several *shu-shou* or *chu-shou* (secretaries)¹¹² for each sub-county canton, township, ward, etc., as the *tu* and other administrative subdivisions of the county (*hsien*) might be called. These heads were chosen using the criterion of relative wealth. In the North there was a widely prevalent and somewhat more flexible system of *she* (community, commune), each of which encompassed up to fifty households. The communes (*she*) were expected to overlap with and complement communities for religious

continued from previous page

Many of the abovementioned views have in practice, if not necessarily in theory or rhetoric, been combined into a more multi-faceted understanding of the *li-chia* by such authors as Tsurumi Naohiro, Kawakatsu Mamoru, and Hamashima Atsutoshi. I hope this chapter will also make clear that I do not see a necessary contradiction between "natural" and "administrative" functions and origins of the *li-chia*. For some good overviews, see Tsurumi Naohiro, "Mindai ni okeru kyōdōtai shihai"; Tsurumi Naohiro, "Kyū Chūgoku ni okeru kyōdōtai no shomondai – Min-Shin Kōnan deruta chitai o chūshin to shite," *Shichō (shin)*, 4 (January 1979), pp. 63–82; Tsurumi Naohiro, "Chūgoku hōken shakai ron." In *Chūseishi kōza dai-5-kan: Hōken shakai ron*, eds. Kimura Shōsaburō, et al. (Tokyo, 1985), pp. 75–105; the introductory chapters in Kawakatsu Mamoru's *Chūgoku hōken kokkei no shihai kōzō* – see also ch. 2 – and Hamashima Atsutoshi's *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1982); Tada Kensuke, "Sengoku-Shin-Kanki ni okeru kyōdōtai to kokka," *Shichō (shin)*, 2 (July 1977), pp. 16–33; Hatada Takashi, "Chūgoku ni okeru senseishugi to sonraku kyōdōtai riron," *Chūgoku kenkyū* 19 (September 1950), rpt. as ch. 1 in his *Chūgoku sonraku to kyōdōtai riron* (Tokyo, 1973); and Kimura Motoi, "'Kyōdōtai no rekishiteki igi' o kentō suru ni atatte," *Shichō (shin)*, 2 (July 1977), pp. 2–15. For many related details, see Germaine A. Hoston, *Marxism and the crisis of development in Prewar Japan* (Princeton, 1986). For sociological investigations, see Fukutake Tadashi, *Chūgoku nōson shakai no kōzō* (1946), rpt. as Fukutake Tadashi *chōsakushū dai-9-kan* (Tokyo, 1976). In English, see Fukutake Tadashi, *Asian rural society: China, India, Japan* (Seattle, 1967).

111 See also Hsiao Kung-chuan [Hsiao Kung-ch'üan], *Rural China – Imperial control in the nineteenth century* (Seattle, 1960).

112 For example, see Kim Chong-bak, "Ming-tai li-chia-chih," ch. 2.

and ceremonial as well as agricultural purposes. These pre-existing units tended to become absorbed into the Ming administrative communities (*li-chia*) as this new system was implemented.

In fact, it is not always possible to sort out the sub-county (sub-*hsien*) administrative institutions established under the new Ming system from the remnants of pre-existing elements of older systems. In Shansi, the name *li-chia* existed as early as 1369–71, where it was associated with land reclamation efforts.¹¹³

Comparisons of the numbers, the names, and sometimes the boundaries of post-1381 administrative communities (*li*) with figures for earlier divisions of the county (*hsien*) show that the communities were mostly based on existing Sung and Yüan divisions. It appears that where an approximation of the official target number of 110 households could not be found, newer units were created either by amalgamating smaller pre-existing units or by subdividing larger ones. No complete redrawing of boundaries that would have created new organizational entities was undertaken. There are indications that even the small re-alignment of the older territorial subdivisions pre-dated 1381. For example, *li-she* (altars for the tutelary gods) and the *hsiang-li-t'an* (altars for the hungry demons) were formally ordered to be established nationwide in 1375 for each religious grouping of about 100 households, indicating that perhaps the administrative community (*li-chia*) was but an extension of the functions of these commune-like groups.¹¹⁴

The administrative community (*li-chia*) system was officially promulgated in 1381, although as we have seen the name and some of the structure of the system had existed earlier in some measure in various locales. It was only natural that the system should be structured by units measured in numbers of households instead of in units of area, since the first land survey was not to be conducted until 1387. That survey resulted in some minor re-wordings of the terms of the new system's definition in 1391. The relationship that the administrative community (*li-chia*) bore to village society will be examined

113 Yamane Yukio, *Mindai yōkei seido*, was one of the earliest writers to point this out. See also Tsurumi, "Mindai ni okeru kyōson shihai," and Tsurumi Naohiro, "Genmatsu, Minsho no gyorinsatsu." In *Yamane Yukio kyōju tai kyū kinen Mindai shi ronsō*, ed. Mindaishi kenkyūkai, Mindaishi ronsō henshū iinkai (Tokyo, 1990), pp. 665–80, and Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka no shihai kōzō*, ch. 1. Nevertheless, most authors do not believe in the widespread existence of either system prior to 1381; for example, see George Jer-lang "Local control in the early Ming (1368–1398)" (Diss., University of Minnesota, 1978).

114 In English, see Chang, "Local control." More information is to be found in Kuribayashi, *Rikōsei no kenkyū*, and Wada Hironori, "Rikōsei to rishadan, kyōreidan – Mindai no kyōson shihai to saishi." In *Nishi to higashi to – Maejima Shinji sensei tsuitō ronbunshū*, ed. Keiō gijuku daigaku Tōyōshi kenkyūshitsu (Tokyo, 1985), pp. 413–32.

after the discussion of the tax obligations, which were the major purpose for implementing the system.¹¹⁵

The community head (*li-chang*) served one year out of every ten years. To distinguish him from the community heads who were not currently serving, he was called the *hsien-nien* (current year [leader]). The others were called *p'ai-nien* (nonserving leaders, in line [to serve] a year). During his year on duty, his principal function was to supervise the collection of the annual summer and autumn tax quotas. At this community level of management, the responsibility for the tax quotas could lead to a kind of de facto tax farming system.¹¹⁶ The other formal responsibilities of the community head (*li-chang*) included the maintenance of local order, the arbitration of disputes, and the maintenance and compilation of the Yellow Registers. He was assisted in some of these tasks by the *liang-chang* (tax captains), the *li-lao* (village elders), and other functionaries. Officially, the community (*li-chia*) headship rotated in a sequence defined according to wealth. It is possible that the wealthiest community head (*li-chang*) served in the year the decennial revision of the Yellow Registers was to be carried out.¹¹⁷ Most probably however, the sequences arrived at in the beginning of the Ming continued for the remainder of the dynasty and were not to be revised.¹¹⁸

Authorities disagree somewhat concerning the point at which the community head (*li-chang*) on duty also became responsible for collecting additional imperial levies and funds for public expenditures.¹¹⁹ In any event, the additional work quickly became a heavy burden. Items that were to be provided by these levies could include animals, furs, feathers, local foods and special delicacies, medicines, dyes, stationery supplies, tea, lacquerware, and various kinds of military supplies. Not all items levied were local products, so it

115 For an overview of some of the following from the magistrate's viewpoint, see Thomas G. Nimick, "The county, the magistrate, and the yamen in late Ming China" (Diss., Princeton University, 1993), and Huang Liu-hung, *Fu-hui ch'üan-shu* (1694) trans. as Djang Chu [Chang Ch'u], trans. and in *A complete book concerning happiness and benevolence: Fu-hui ch'üan-shu - a manual for local magistrates in seventeenth-century China* (Tucson, 1984).

116 See Matsumoto Yoshimi, "Mindai." In *Chügoku chibō jichi hattatsushu*, ed. Wada Sei (Tokyo, 1939), p. 99; his views are more developed in his posthumously published collection of articles. See Matsumoto Yoshimi, *Chügoku sonraiku seido no shiteki kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1977), esp. pp. 100–39 and pp. 459–587.

117 There was a different kind of sequence for the *chia*: it was important that households with males who would reach the age at which they became subject to duty (sixteen *su*) only near the end of the ten-year period between revisions of the lists would be listed for duty in these later years so that they would be available as soon as possible for labor duties. See, for example, Okuzaki Hiroshi, *Chügoku kyōshin jinushi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1978), ch. 6.

118 See Tanaka Issei, *Chügoku saishi engaki kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1981), part 2, ch. 1.

119 Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*, assumes an early date; Iwami Hiroshi, in his *Mindai yōeki seido no kenkyū*, Tōyōshi kenkyū sōkan, 39 (Kyōto, 1986) dates it somewhat later, and Huang, *Taxation*, sees it occurring only after 1550. The last date is certainly too late.

often became necessary to rely on the market to obtain the items demanded.¹²⁰ The other category of special payments (those for local public expenditures) were for gifts, spring festival contributions, sacrifices and ritual expenses, examination candidates' travel money, the provision of medicines as preparation against epidemics, and personnel to serve as clerks for the yamen from the provincial level down to the level of the local magistracy.¹²¹ In those places not served by postal relay stations, the entire group of community heads on duty, including the neighborhood heads who were serving, had to bear the costs of providing people and animals for transporting the levied items.¹²²

From the beginning, something akin to collective tax responsibility is evident in the management of these special levies: the community heads (*li-chang*) were responsible for providing the requested taxes, but how these taxes were to be paid or how they were to be re-distributed among some or all of the villagers was left undefined. A rule that was often quoted said that the community head (*li-chang*) on duty had to supply 30 percent of the taxes and that the ten neighborhood heads (*chia-shou*) under him were to provide the remaining 70 percent; but known variations on this principle ranged from a situation in which the community head (*li-chang*) bore responsibility for the entire levy to situations in which the entire burden of the levy was passed on to the whole *li* unit.

Miscellaneous corvée responsibilities or *tsa-i*,¹²³ were required along with these so-called "regular" (*cheng-i*) functions.¹²⁴ These miscellaneous services could include various services performed for the central government as the need arose in county (*hsien*) or prefectural seats, transport duties for the postal

120 See, especially, Iwami, *Mindai yōeki seido*; Iwami Hiroshi, "Kasei nenkan no ryokusa ni tsuite." In Tamura hakushi shōju Tōyōshi ronsō, ed. Tamura hakushi taikan kinen jigyōka (Kyōto, 1968), pp. 39–56; and Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*.

121 Kuribayashi, *Rikōsei no kenkyū*, part 2.

122 Oyama Masaaki, in "Fu-eki seido no henkaku" and "Ajia no hōkensei" stresses these "exploitative" levies.

123 These "miscellaneous" duties could be quite "regular:" there was a great, but still limited number of them, and a well-defined quota for each of them developed soon. Some of these functions were localized, but the great majority were surprisingly similar over a large area, if not necessarily the whole country. It is therefore wrong to translate *tsa-i* as "irregular" services; perhaps the only real irregular services were those connected with public works, often connected with water conservancy or road repairs. There are not too many references to these services, perhaps because they were easily seen as necessary and therefore engendered fewer complaints, and perhaps because they were shared by a much larger group of people, lessening the burden for each single person.

124 *Cheng-i* included those functions connected with serving as a *li-chang* or a *chia-shou*. Corvée exemptions never legally included these functions; they only extended to the *tsa-i* or miscellaneous duties. Hence, the later conflicts over whether community functions that had developed later, such as village elders, poldermasters (*l'ang-chang*), secretaries (*shu-shou*), or constables (*tsung- or hsiao-chia*) – some of which had originated in the differentiation of the functions of the *li-chang* – were to be counted as regular or miscellaneous corvée.

relay stations to assist the special postal relay service households, providing for local law and order, meeting demands for artisans, and providing assistance in collecting and transporting tax grain.¹²⁵ Early in the dynasty, these duties were not onerous; they normally involved no more than three or four local households from among the serving neighborhood heads (*chia-shou*) each year and left all the other households free of obligations.¹²⁶ The privileges of exemption from actual corvée labor, or later, from the conversion of corvée labor into money or payment in kind, which eventually came to play such a large role in undermining the administrative community (*li-chia*) system, did not legally apply to the regular community (*li*) services.

All households were classified according to three main categories in the Yellow Registers: civilian (*min* – ordinary people), military (*chün*), and artisan (*chiang*), with small numbers of people in other categories.¹²⁷ Entities that were not households had to register in the community (*li-chia*) records as well. Each temple had to register as one household and fulfill the corresponding duties. It was even possible that there could be communities (*li*) with no civilian households at all.¹²⁸ Military and artisan households, officials, and clerks were exempted from the irregular corvée obligations. In those areas where military households made up as much as 50 percent of the local population, this exemption could create a hardship for the civilian households that made up the rest of the population.

Implementations of the li-chia system

Using the most general definition, the administrative community (*li*) was “a territorially compact group of around 110 tax-liable land-owning households.”¹²⁹ The census lists for these administrative communities (*li*), as was pointed out above, were hardly ever up-dated. Once a community (*li*) had

125 Yamane, *Mindai yōkei seido*.

126 According to Yamane, and many sources I have seen, only landowners were involved in miscellaneous duties. According to Ming law, however, every adult male was subject to corvée. See, for example, Chang Hsien-ch'ing, “Ming-tai kuan-shen yu-mien ho shu-min 'chung-hu' ti yao-i fu-tan,” *Li-shih yen-chiu*, 2 (1986), pp. 161–74. The low number of people actually recruited makes this a moot point except in the cases of non-landowning wealthy merchants' households, or later, when corvée was converted into money payments and redistributed among the whole *li*.

127 Wang Yü-ch'üan is one author who insists that the elaborate Yüan system of classifying households was taken over by the Ming state and strictly implemented. His own culling of quantified sources shows however the extreme marginality of most classifications and that, in many cases, such registration was highly desirable since it entailed exemption from any other service duties. See, for example, Wang Yu-chuan (Wang Yü-ch'üan), “Some salient features of the Ming labor service system,” *Ming Studies*, 21 (Spring 1986), pp. 1–44; Wang Yü-ch'üan, “Ming ch'ao yao-i shen-pien yü,” *Li-shih yen-chiu*, 1 (1988), pp. 162–80; and Wang Yü-ch'üan, “Ming ch'ao ti p'ei hu tang ch'ai chih,” *Chung-kuo-shih yen-chiu*, 1 (1991), pp. 24–43. I emphatically do not see such marginal leftover irregularities as symptomatic of an all-encompassing, rigorous autocratic system.

128 As was the case in one *li* in Hui-an. 129 Tsurumi, “Mindai ni okeru kyōson shihai.”

been defined, it functioned thereafter as a perpetuating localized grouping. The decennial revision updated the information concerning the households already on the community's record lists, but no census was taken in order to update the records with regard to those who might have migrated into the area.

The relationship of the Ming administrative community (*li*) to other, presumably pre-existing, settlement patterns in both extent and content must be considered. As we have noted, one of the earliest foci of debate on the nature of the Ming administrative community (*li-chia*) was whether it was a pre-existing natural village with its own village institutions, or whether it disregarded those village boundaries by design in order to create "administrative" villages that were distinct from "natural" villages.

A major obstacle to clarifying this issue is that the contemporary study of the settlement geography of China is still at the stage it was in the West a century ago.¹³⁰ Yet, the average size of a village, its general internal social and political structures, its religious and other traditions matter in determining its history, as do such external characteristics as its topography, its economic foundations, and its relations with other villages. These factors certainly must have influenced state control and should be important to us as historians.¹³¹

130 The first few westerners who have tried their hand at the Chinese case, such as Hartmut Scholz, "The rural settlements in the eighteen provinces of China," *Sinologica*, 3 (1953), pp. 37-49, do not go much further than to distinguish between settlements of different ethnic groups; the special case most frequently mentioned is that of the cave-dwelling villages of the loess region in Shensi. For China proper, most writers have taken the limited village types known personally to them as representative of the whole. Even some Chinese writers, trained as rural sociologists in the west, such as Martin M.C. Yang, seem to repeat the village patterns about which they have learned abroad rather than dealing with the reality of China itself. See Yang Mao-ch'un, *Chin-tai Chung-kuo nung-ts'ün she-hui chih yen-pien* (Taipei, 1980).

131 For a recent, but still inadequate outline, see Segawa Masahisa, "Mura no katachi: Kanan sonraku no tokushoku," *Minzokugaku kenkyū*, 47, No. 1 (June 1982), pp. 31-50; see also his *Chūgokujin no sonraku to sōzoku-Honkon shinkai nōson no shakai jinruigakuteki kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1991). Skinner's influential market pattern studies derive mainly from Szechwan, widely recognized as an atypical case. See G. William Skinner, "Marketing and social structure in rural China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24, No. 1 (November 1964) pp. 3-43; 24, No. 2 (February 1965), pp. 195-228; 24, No. 3 (May 1965), pp. 363-99. For some critics, see Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford, 1988); Philip C. C. Huang, *The peasant economy and social change in North China* (Stanford, 1985); and Arthur P. Wolf, "Social hierarchy and cultural diversity - a critique of G. William Skinner's view of Chinese peasant culture." In *Chung-yang yen-chiu yüan ti-erb-chieh kuo-chi Han-hsieh hui-i lun-wen-chi* (December 29-31, 1986-Ch'ing-chu Chung-yang yen-chiu yüan yüan ch'ing liu-shih chou-nien): *Min-su yü wen-hua tsu*, ed. Chung-yang yen-chiu yüan (Taipei, 1989), pp. 311-18. Yonekura, *Tōa no shūraku*, Nakamura Jihei, "Chūgoku shūrakushi kenkyū no kaiten to tenbō-toku ni sonrakushi o chūshin to shite." In *Chūgoku shūrakushi no kenkyū-shūben sho chūiki to sono hikaku o fukumete*, ed. Tōdaishi kenkyūkai, Tōdaishi kenkyūkai hōkoku dai-3-shū ([Tokyo], 1980), pp. 5-22; and Matsumoto, *Chūgoku sonraku teido*. These different types also have to be studied in an historically grounded sociological way; for more modern periods, see such exemplary studies as David Faure, *The structure of*

Footnote continued on next page

Although some authors have misinterpreted regional variations in village structure and makeup as diachronic phenomena,¹³² we cannot assume modern characteristics to be valid for Ming China. One of the principal general characteristics of North China villages described in the gazetteers, to cite an example, is the large number of villages subordinate to one *li* which, in early Ming times at least, should have contained closer to 100 than 200 households.¹³³ In contrast to late Ch'ing conditions, therefore, hamlets in the North during the Ming seem to have been quite small, consisting of ten to twenty households at most. The average size of a village in the North increased greatly from the early Ming to the late Ch'ing. In the North, perhaps owing to a relative scarcity of available water, the population growth from the Ming to the Ch'ing resulted in larger villages and hence larger intra-village solidarity, whereas in the South, with irrigation available everywhere, the number of settlements increased instead, resulting in more single-lineage villages.¹³⁴

While some rare examples of large villages in Chiang-nan that might be called small towns were subdivided into several *li*, the most general pattern is that of the *li* that combined several hamlets or polders. The *li* was thus not the lowest level of "basic, natural" organizational units, but constituted a territorial amalgamation of such units that was made on the basis of earlier pre-existing units so that the *li* approached the target of 110 households each. The cooperation within these pre-existing social units (especially in matters of religion and irrigation) sometimes predated and sometimes postdated the government's interference. Reaching the government's organizational target for the size of the *li* was usually not very difficult, since there were not many existing social units large enough to have to be cut up. The large terri-

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Chinese rural society: lineage and village in the Eastern New Territories (Hong Kong, 1986); Ishida Hiroshi, *Chūgoku nōson shakai keizai kōzō no kenkyū* (Kyoto, 1986); Ishida Hiroshi, *Chūgoku nōson no rekishi to keizai-nōson henkaku no kiroku*, Historical perspectives on Chinese rural economy (Ōsaka, 1991); and also Charles Albert Litzinger, "Temple community and village cultural integration in North China: evidence from 'sectarian cases' (*chiao-an*) in Chihli, 1860-93" (Diss., University of California at Davis, 1983).

132 Skinner's "open" and "closed" villages are better explained as resulting from regional, geographical, and cultural differences rather than from dynastic cycles. See, for example, Segawa, "Mura no katachi." Certainly, villages were not closed nationwide during the Ming-Ch'ing transition, quite the contrary. See G. William Skinner, "Chinese peasants and the closed community: an open and shut case," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 13, No. 3 (July 1971), pp. 271-78.

133 Kuribayashi, *Rikōsei no kenkyū*, chapter 1. See also Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka no shihai kōzō*. It might be important that one well (in the North) or irrigation pond (in the South) serves on the average a group of five to ten households – a *chia*? Also, hoe units in the Ming were of that size. See Tsurumi, "Mindai ni okeru kyōson shihai."

134 See the migration patterns in Chekiang as noted in Ueda, "Chiiki no rirēki," and Ueda, "Chiiki to sōzoku." Many authors have seen single-lineage villages as a secondary development. For example, see Segawa, "Mura no katachi," or Ishida, *Chūgoku nōson shakai keizai kōzō*.

torial extent of the *li* seems to have created a problem in some parts of Shansi and Shensi. In the cases of these regions, smaller *li* (*pan-li* or half *li*, sometimes with fewer neighborhoods [*chia*], sometimes with smaller ones)¹³⁵ were permitted in order to ensure that the hamlets comprising an administrative community (*li*) would not be too widely dispersed.

In some regions where the structure of a lineage was strong, as for instance in Kwangtung, an administrative community (*li*) might even be based on one lineage.¹³⁶ Thus, most often the new communities (*li*) bore older names and were based on earlier social patterns.¹³⁷ Despite all these territorial and social antecedents, the community (*li*) was officially a unit defined for administrative purposes by a certain number of households.

Many of the problems regarding land measurement and taxation that would be experienced in subsequent centuries can be explained by the increasing discrepancy between the originally compact territory of these administrative communities (*li*) and the later dispersed area occupied by the households that had originally belonged to them. Although many of the original members of an administrative community (*li*) would have moved out, they still had to retain their identification as members of their original *li*.

Different aspects of the village were emphasized in different regions. Lü K'un (1536–1618),¹³⁸ a native of Honan, defined a “population *li*,” or community (*li*) defined by its population, as a “buyer’s *li*,” meaning that tax obligations on land purchased should be met by the possibly distant community (*li*) to which the buyer officially belonged rather than by the community with which the land had originally been associated. He defined a “territorial *li*” as a “seller’s *li*,” meaning that the tax obligations on purchased land should continue to be met by the original compact community (*li*) to which the land had belonged even if the purchaser resided elsewhere.¹³⁹ These definitions reflect a perpetual problem for which no real solution was found prior

135 T'ang Wen-chi even gives an example (Hsing-kuo in Hu-kuang) where, in 1562, there existed so-called *i-fen-li* (one-tenth *li*): *Ming-tai fu-i chih-tu shih*, p. 332.

136 As has become clear through studies by, among others, Matsuda Yoshirō, “Minmatsu Shinsho Kanton Shukō deruta no saden kaihatsu to kyōshin shihai no keisei katei,” *Shakai keizai shigaku*, 46, No. 6 (March 1981), pp. 55–81; or already Shimizu Morimitsu, *Chūgoku kyōson shakai ron* (Tokyo, 1951).

137 Kuribayashi, *Rikōsei no kenkyū*; see also map 3 in Makino Tatsumi, “Chūgoku ni okeru sōzoku no sonraku bunpu ni kansuru tōkeiteki ichi shiryō – Sengenkyōshi ni tsuite,” *Kazoku to sonraku*, 2 ([March 1942]) rpt in his *Makino Tatsumi chosakushū dai-3-kan, Kinsei Chūgoku sōzoku kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1980), p. 265, which makes this clear.

138 See his biography in *DMB*, pp. 1006–10.

139 See Shimizu Morimitsu, *Chūgoku kyōson shakai ron*.

to the present.¹⁴⁰ This problem existed throughout the Ming and Ch'ing periods, and most reforms that attempted to register or re-register the population according to the location of their land (or, alternatively, their place of abode), were outdated after a few decades unless the information was constantly updated.¹⁴¹

The li-chia as a community

The debate, which often has political overtones, about whether a *li* functioned as a natural or as an artificial community still continues. It is more important, however, to reflect upon the actual integrative forces within the village. Villagers in villages in northern and southern China possessed certain rights related to the village with which they were identified. Throughout China, there were communal temples and communal religious celebrations; there was some communal land that provided communal grazing rights; villages were entities with respect to rights for water usage; and villagers had the right of first refusal with respect to village land that was sold.¹⁴² Village rules, extant in Ming period publications,¹⁴³ include rules governing the rights to collect firewood, dig mud fertilizer from ponds and watercourses, and harvest bamboo shoots and grass. Cooperation was necessary in many aspects of village life both to provide basic public services (roads, dikes, temples, schools, and the like) and in order to enhance the status of a village over and against other competing villages. Because of the increases in population, such communal cooperation became ever more necessary. It has also been pointed out that villagers paid levies to provide for social needs that could not have been

140 The opposition between these two systems does not necessarily parallel the usage of the terms *li* and *li'u*, as Brook, "Spatial structure," thought. From the very beginning, a *li* could be seen as territorial. See, for example, Okuzaki Hiroshi, *Chūgoku kyōshin jinushi*, p. 98.

141 See also Duara, *Culture, power and the state*, and Sidney D. Gamble, *North China villages – social, political, and economic activities before 1933* (Berkeley, 1963), for similar problems during the early twentieth century.

142 See Hatada Takashi, *Chūgoku sonraku to kyōdōtai riron* (Tokyo, 1973). For other revisionists who try to correct views of the Chinese village as amorphous, see the works of David Faure, Ishida Hiroshi, and Philip Huang cited in n. 131.

143 One example is the *San-i' ai Wan-yung cheng-tsung* (['Yü] *San-i' ai's multiple-use encyclopedia*). Many examples are investigated by Niida; see Niida Noboru, "Gen-Min jidai no mura no kiyaku to kosaku shōsho nado (1)–nichiyō hyakka zensho no tagui nijishū no naka kara," *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 8 ([1936]), rpt. in his (*Hotei*) *Chūgoku bōseishi ken'yū: Dorei nōdōbō/Kazoku sonrakubō* (first ed., 1964; Tokyo, 1981), pp. 743–89; Niida Noboru, "Gen-Min jidai no mura no kiyaku to kosaku shōsho ni tsuite – arata ni chōsa shita nichiyō hyakka zensho no tagui nijishū ni yotte," rpt. in (*Hotei*) *Chūgoku*, pp. 790–829 (originally part of his research in 1961); and Niida Noboru, "Gen-Min jidai no mura to kiyaku to kosaku shōsho nado (3) – toku ni Gentai teikan 'Shinben ji bun rui yō kei satsu sei sen' ni tsuite," rpt. in (*Hotei*) *Chūgoku*, pp. 671–93. His original manuscript of the latter is dated 1963.

met on an individual basis.¹⁴⁴ In addition, during the Ming many kinds of religious celebrations were organized, paid for, and carried out on a village basis.

Thus, it is increasingly clear that rather than being an attempt to cut through existing social ties, the entire administrative community (*li-chia*) concept from the very beginning revolved around the incorporation of existing social units in order to benefit both the state and the village farming population. The community (*li-chia*) as a tax and corvée unit was paralleled by the community (*li-chia*) as a social and communal unit. These communities might have functioned on a plane above that of the natural villages in some cases, but they nonetheless maintained significant social cohesion.

Probably because of his early life as the son of a destitute village farming household, Chu Yüan-chang seems to have adopted more measures showing an understanding of peasants than any other Chinese emperor. While he implemented many traditional methods to revive agriculture and to benefit his people, such as encouraging resettlement, assisting in land reclamation, freeing recently indentured bondsmen, and appointing agricultural officials,¹⁴⁵ he also took great interest in promoting local religious, communal, educational and judicial practices. One of the first measures undertaken was the installation of a *li-she* (altar for tutelary gods) and a *hsiang-li-t'an* (altar for appeasing wandering ghosts) in "every county and village" with the target number of one per 100 households. A system for accomplishing that, incorporating pre-existing religious associations (*hui*), was proclaimed on a nationwide basis in 1375. Between 1369 and 1372, the so-called "village wine-drinking ceremony" (*hsiang-yin-chiu li*) designed to inculcate moral values in local society was promoted nationwide. Although it did not enjoy widespread success or acceptance, it still caught on enough to remain in practice centuries later in some localities.¹⁴⁶ In 1372, the local village headmen called "*li-chang*" prior to the implementation of the *li-chia* in 1381 were also instructed to build and operate two types of village halls: the *shen-ming-t'ing* (Village Court Pavilion) where local offenders were publicly subjected to community shame; and the somewhat later *ching-shan-t'ing* (Village Exemplary Pavilion),

144 See, for example, Watanabe Shin'ichirō, "Chūgoku zenkindaishi kenkyū no kadai to shōkeiei seisan yōshiki." In *Chūgoku shizō no saikōsei-kōkka to nōmin*, ed. Chūgokushi kenkyūkai (Kyōto, 1983), pp. 37–54; and Yoshida Kōichi, "Gendai Chūgoku ninshiki to Chūgokushi kenkyū no shikaku," in the same work, pp. 1–36.

145 Those, however, were not as effective as existing local community devices; see Morita Akira, "Mindai Kōnan no suiri to jinōkan," *Fukuoka daigaku kenkyūjō* bō 14, (1971), rpt. in his *Shindai suirishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1974), pp. 417–49.

146 See Mori Masao, "Minmatsu no shakai kankei ni okeru chitsujō no hendō ni tsuite," *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu sanjishūnen kinen ronshū* (Nagoya, 1979), pp. 135–59, referring to Wu-chiang in southern Chiang-su.

in which social virtue was propounded. Such halls may have been widely extended to every sub-*hsien* division even before their rearrangement under the *li-chia* system.¹⁴⁷ There are conflicting views on how well they functioned and how long they endured,¹⁴⁸ but other information suggests that they did not entirely disappear and kept significant functions.¹⁴⁹

More important material on the life of the rural village is provided by the evidence for the *li-lao* (village elders) system, the communal functions given to the *li-chang* (village headman) and to a lesser extent to the *liang-chang* (tax captain) in the famous imperially promulgated compilations known as the *Ta-kao* (*The great warnings*, issued 1385–87)¹⁵⁰ and the *Chiao-min pang-wen* (*The placard of people's instructions* issued in 1394–98). The traditional role of the elders as community arbitrators was promoted by the central government. Originally, there could be as many as three to ten village elders per community (*li*),¹⁵¹ paralleling the number of natural hamlets, but later, one elder per community (*li*) was more common.¹⁵² The village elder system was subject to some abuse, especially when officials treated the elders as though their only purpose was to fulfill corvée labor and hence as subjects ripe for exploitation.¹⁵³ Nonetheless, until the end of the Ming, most requests for reform were either initiated by the elders themselves, or by the elders in consultation with local gentry or officials. It is not always clear whether “official” *li* elders or informally functioning ones are indicated in the reports that mention them.

The *Placard of people's instructions* (*Chiao-min pang-wen*) gives wide powers to, or recognized the power of, the village headman (*li-chang*) and the elders for arbitrating disputes, maintaining local order, arresting felons, and making local provisions for the punishment of lighter offenses. The local leaders

147 See Kuribayashi, *Rikōsei no kenkyū*, part I, ch. 3; the exact level on which they were established seems to vary according to the sources consulted; officially there was one for each *li*, in practice there was often only one per higher-level unit, for example, a canton (*tu*).

148 In the Hsüan-te period, most *t'ing* (pavillions) in Shaan-hsi were already in disrepair. See Okuzaki, *Chūgoku kyōshin jinushi*, p. 50, n. 68.

149 Okumura Ikuzō, “Chūgoku ni okeru kanryōsei to jichi no ketten—saibanken o chūshin to shite,” *Hōseishi kenkyū*, 19 (1969), pp. 25–50, notes on pp. 30–31, the continued use, especially of *shen-ming-t'ing*, for the arbitration of local disputes.

150 For a study of the *Ta-kao*, see Yang I-fan, *Ming ta-kao yen-chiu* ([Nan-ching], 1988).

151 On the village elders in English, there are the works of George Jer-lang Chang: his “Local control,” his “The village elder system of the Ming dynasty,” *Ming Studies*, 7 (Fall 1978), pp. 53–62; and his translation, “The placard of people's instructions (*Chiao-min pang-wen*),” *Ming Studies*, 7 (Fall 1978), pp. 63–72. There are conflicting views, however, on when the system ever was strictly regulated, when (or whether) it was introduced, temporarily discontinued, or reinstituted. For one opinion, in my view not completely reliable, see Hosono Kōji, “Rirōjin to kirōjin,” *Sbigaku zasshi*, 78, No. 7 (July 1969), pp. 51–68. See also Tsurumi, “Mindai ni okeru kyōson shihai,” and Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka*.

152 Hsiao Kung-chuan [Hsiao Kung-ch'üan], *Compromise in Imperial China*, Parerga, 6 (Seattle, 1979), p. 33, n. 75, discusses the functioning of elder-led arbitration of disputes in later imperial village society.

153 Shimizu Morimitsu, *Chūgoku kyōson shakai ron*, and Kuribayashi, *Rikōsei no kenkyū*.

were also responsible for overseeing small-scale community irrigation works, providing norias and other hydraulic devices where possible;¹⁵⁴ for the supervision of moral exhortation by proclaiming the officially sponsored morality books and maxims; for the recruitment of policemen and occasionally of militia forces; for the promotion of mutual assistance in agriculture and in ceremonial practices, especially those required for funerals; and for being a source of advice in many other kinds of community involvements.¹⁵⁵

In sum, there clearly was a degree of local autonomy under those in the administrative community (*li-chia*) who by reason of their status or means could provide the leadership.

The institution of the tax captains (*liang-chang*) for areas that were much larger than a community (*li*), however, emerged independently of that special background of local leadership. Tax captains were first appointed in the lower Yangtze region in 1371. One tax captain (*liang-chang*) was responsible for supervising the tax collection in an area with a tax quota of about 10,000 piculs. More important, he was responsible for delivering the tax to specially designated granaries.¹⁵⁶ Although the system was somewhat flexible with regard to its basis for establishing the scope of a tax captain's responsibilities, whether that was limited to an area in which taxes were stored at a particular granary,¹⁵⁷ or to a number of households,¹⁵⁸ or whether those responsibilities were decided on the basis of the amount of tax to be collected, the link between the tax captain's office and the local community is not easily established and may have been nonexistent, even though tax captains undoubtedly were selected because they were persons who were locally influential.¹⁵⁹ It was not always possible to find persons qualified by wealth and stature in

154 Tsurumi, "Kyū Chūgoku ni okeru kyōdōtai no shomondai."

155 For further details on these aspects of village leaders' responsibilities, see Shimizu, *Chūgoku kyōson shakai ron*, and Chang, "Local control." Different practices could go through different cycles of popularity; the communal recitation of the *Ta-keao* had fallen into abeyance by 1450, but was later revived; see Okuzaki Hiroshi, *Chūgoku kyōshin jinushi*, ch. 3. See also Sakai Tadao, *Chūgoku zensho no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1960).

156 Yamane, *Mindaiyōeki seido*, and Yamane Yukio, "Mindai Kahoku ni okeru ekishō no tokushitsu." In Shimizu hakushi tsuitō kinen: *Mindaishi ronsō*, ed. Shimizu hakushi tsuitō kinen henshū iinkai (Tokyo, 1962), pp. 221–30. Oyama's contention that existing divisions were sharply restructured to result in an equal 10,000 *tan* collection per *liang-chang* has been found to be incorrect. See Oyama Masaaki, "Mindai no ryōchō ni tsuite – toku ni zenpanki no Kōnan deruta chitai o chūshin ni shite," *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 27, No. 4 (March 1969), pp. 24–68.

157 As in Hu-chou prefecture; see Yamane, *Mindaiyōeki seido*.

158 As in Chi-hsi, Anhwei; see Liang Fang-chung, "Ming-tai liang-chang chih-tu," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih chi-k'ue'an*, 7, No. 2 (July 1946), pp. 107–33, trans. as "Local tax collections in the Ming dynasty." In *Chinese social history in translations of selected studies*, eds. and trans. E-tu Zen (Jen I-tu) Sun and John deFrancis, American Council of Learned Societies – Studies in Chinese and Related Civilizations, No. 7 (1957), pp. 249–69.

159 There was a brief experiment between 1382 and 1385 when the tax captains were abolished in the hope that the village heads (*li-chang*) would be able to bear the responsibilities they had held; but this was found to be unworkable, and the institution was re-established.

each locality, so tax captains were often appointed from other localities. This meant that in many cases they were not, strictly speaking, part of the local society where they served; but in general, they tended to be persons who already commanded some sort of authority to “be obeyed” rather than persons who had obtained that power only from the terms of their government appointments.¹⁶⁰

In the northern provinces of Shantung, Honan, Shensi, and Ho-pei, as well as in Szechwan, a more or less analogous system, but one using different terminology, has been found. In these known examples, the term *ta-hu* (great household) appears to mean the same as *liang-chang* (tax captain) in the lower Yangtze and elsewhere.¹⁶¹

Internal divisions of the li-chia

The division of the leadership of a community (*li*) among ten community heads (*li-chang*) who served in rotation, and the division of the one hundred other households into ten household units were not the only formal divisions within a community (*li*). In 1385, the neighborhood heads (*chia-shou*) were divided into three rankings (*san-teng*) according to wealth, those differentiations being used to assess miscellaneous corvée labor assignments. It was strictly forbidden to divide an original household, for one upper rank household when divided might constitute two new middle or lower rank households, which would deprive the tax base of a needed category. Moreover, in addition to the 110 regular households, a community (*li*) might include two other groups, one called the “attached households” (*tai-kuan-hu*), and the other, the “odds-and-ends households” (*chi-ling-hu*).¹⁶² The regulations governing these groups are not always clear. It appears that the odds-and-ends households might have been made up of people from incomplete households and that these households included widows and elderly persons as well as children. They were not subject to corvée labor, but probably were subject to the grain tax if they owned land. In 1391, the category of *chi-chuang-hu* (absentee landlord) was added to the community (*li*) structure. These were households registered elsewhere and therefore subject to levies of regular and miscellaneous corvée labor at their place of registration, but who were now required to pay land (grain) tax within the community

160 Liang, “Local tax collections;” Liang Fang-chung, *Ming-tai liang-chang chih-tu* (Shanghai, 1957); and Okuzaki, *Chūgoku kyōshin jinushi*.

161 There is nonetheless some debate about this. See Taniguchi Kikuo, “Mindai Kahoku no ‘taiko’ ni tsuite,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 7, No. 4 (March 1969), pp. 112–43, and Littrup, *Subbureaucratic government*.

162 See Tsurumi Naohiro, “Mindai no kireiko ni tsuite,” *Tōyō gakuhō*, 47, No. 3 (December 1964), pp. 35–64. Not all documents seem to make a distinction between these two categories, however. Temples, if they owned land, were to be classified as one normal household; if they did not, as an attached household. See Kim Chong-bak, “Ming-tai li-chia-chih,” p. 36.

(*li*) where their newly purchased land was located. The addition of this category illustrates the origins of the problem discussed above of whether the *li* was to be defined by the territory under its control or by the people who belonged to it. This “splitting” of a household, which actually amounted to setting up a dummy household for tax purposes in another *li* where land was acquired, was the only situation in which the division of a household was nominally allowed.¹⁶³

According to one opinion, the so-called attached households (*tai-kuan-hu*) were those households “left over” when a canton or township (*tu*) was divided up into administrative communities (*li*), but the issue of where their corvée and tax obligations were to be met is not clear: some regulations said these households should serve the canton (*tu*) as a whole, while other regulations “attached” them to the community head (*li-chang*).¹⁶⁴ It is worth noting that from the beginning there was an institutionalized basis for including more than 110 households in a community (*li*).¹⁶⁵

One of our greatest problems in understanding the community (*li-chia*) system is that we do not know where tenants fit in. Because everybody else was incorporated into the community (*li-chia*) and the population registers, including the irregularly constituted households mentioned above, it would have been impossible to leave out those who were tenants. Some tenants became independent landowners when Chu Yüan-chang conferred ownership on many landless cultivators in 1368. Many tenants simultaneously owned some land and would be classified among the ordinary community (*li*) households according to their wealth. Nonetheless, there must also have been tenants who owned no land of their own, even though it is difficult now to say exactly how the system dealt with them. Other landowners probably used the labor of slaves, bondservants, or hired hands in preference to the labor of tenants. Those helpers would no doubt have been classified as members of that landowner’s household. And since still earlier Sung times, many tenants had become quite autonomous, using contracts to obtain the

163 Kawakatsu, *Chügoku hōken kokkei*, pp. 186–202, and Tsurumi, “Mindai ni okeru kyōson shihai,” have stressed the general prohibition against splitting households (*hsi-hu*), as opposed to Oyama, who once saw it as a necessary way of ensuring equally capable *chia*. See Oyama Masaaki, “Mindai no jūdanhō ni tsuite” (1). In *Zenkindai Ajia no hō to shakai*, vol. 1, ed. Niida Noboru hakushi tsuitō kinen ronbunshū henshū iinkai, *Niida Noboru hakushi tsuitō kinen ronbunshū* (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 365–86; (2) *Chiba daigaku bunrigakubu bunka kagaku kiyō*, 10 (March 1968), pp. 1–40. For the question of splitting households, see also n. 32.

164 See Tsurumi, “Mindai no kireiko.”

165 See Tsurumi, “Mindai no kireiko,” and also Brook, “Spatial structure,” n. 100. This fact completely invalidates the Ming data “computed” by Robert M. Hartwell, “Demographic, political and social transformations of China, 750–1550,” *HJAS*, 42, No. 2 (December 1982), pp. 365–442.

use of land and maneuvering to rent from different landowners bits and pieces that would make up compact plots.¹⁶⁶

The whole concept of the administrative community (*li-chia*) system presupposes the existence of labor provided by a taxable farming population. Therefore, after the wars that established the dynasty and especially after the founder, Chu Yüan-chang, took special measures to eliminate the tenancy caused by those war conditions, we must assume that the overwhelming majority of households owned at least part of the land they cultivated. Views that the Ming period was “feudal” because it was based primarily on a landlord–tenant relationship in which powerful landlords controlled local agrarian society, although long prevalent among many historians, must be fundamentally modified. Such a modification does not deny that there could have been great local differences in wealth already present in early Ming China. In Ch’ung-an county of Fukien, around 1380, 11 percent of the households paid 83 percent of the land tax. In the wealthiest of all prefectures, Suchou, at the end of the fourteenth century, 490 households paid from 100 to 400 piculs (*tan*; also read *shih*) of tax in grain on the land they owned; fifty-six paid from 500 to 1,000 piculs; six paid more than 2,000 piculs; and two households paid more than 3,800 piculs. Yet only 14,341 households in the entire country possessed more than 700 *mu* of land.¹⁶⁷ Even when disregarding the households under 100 piculs, the tax distribution is highly unequal, as Figure 9.4 shows.

There is a statement that tenants who rented official land (*kuan-f’ien*) were accepted as normal registered households (*chia-shou*). This suggests that other tenants were not considered normal registered households and therefore were to be classified among the attached households (*tai-kuan-hu*) or the

166 This was the thesis of Miyazaki Ichisada in his “Sōdai igo no tochi shoyū keitai,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 12, No. 2 (December 1952), pp. 1–34. His view has recently been at least implicitly corroborated by the *yü-lin-ts’u* studies of Tsurumi Naohiro. See Tsurumi Naohiro “Gyorinsatsu o tazunete;” his “Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan shozō Kōki jūgonen jōryō no Chōshūken gyorinsatsu ippon ni tsuite.” In *Yamazaki sensei taikan kinen Tōyō shigaku ronsō*, ed. Yamazaki sensei taikan kinenkai (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 303–18; his “Shinsho, Soshūfu no gyorinsatsu ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu – Chōshūken, ge nijūgato shōzen jūkyūzu gyorinsatsu o chūshin to shite,” *Shakai keizai shigaku*, 34, No. 5 (January 1969), pp. 1–31; his “Kōki jūgonen jōryō, Soshūfu Chōshūken gyorin tosatsu no dendo tōkeiteki kōsatsu.” In *Kimura Masao sensei taikan kinen Tōyōshi ronshū*, ed. Kimura Masao sensei taikan kinen jigyōkai Tōyōshi ronshū henshū iinkai (Chōfu, 1976), pp. 311–44; and his “Futatabi, Kōki jūgonen jōryō no Soshūfu Chōshūken gyorinsatsu ni kansuru dendo tōkeiteki kōsatsu.” In *Nakajima Satoshi sensei koki kinen ronshū*, ed. Nakajima Satoshi sensei koki kinen jigyōkai (Tokyo, 1980), pp. 415–33. Also see Adachi Keiichi, “Shindai Soshū-fu ka ni okeru jinushiteki tochi shoyū no tenkai,” *Kumamoto daigaku bungakubu ronsō*, 9 (November 1982), pp. 24–56; and Keiji’s “Shin-Minkokuni ni okeru nōgyō keiei no hatten–Chōkō karyūiki no baai.” In *Chūgoku shizō no saikōsei-kokka to nōmin*, ed. Chūgokushi kenkyūkai (Kyōto, 1983), pp. 255–88.

167 These figures from 1397 come from the *shih-lu* (2nd month, 1370), and are cited, for example, in Terada, “Mindai Soshū heiya no nōka,” p. 8, and Chang, “Local control,” p. 95.

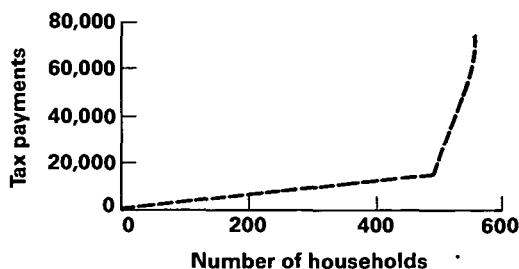


Figure 9.4. Su-chou tax distribution in 1370

odds-and-ends households (*chi-ling-bu*).¹⁶⁸ The laws regulating corvée and other obligations are unclear at a number of points, especially with regard to whether they applied to nonlandowning households. Legally, they probably did. In practice, however, the smaller landowning households were exempt and that should have been true for tenants as well.¹⁶⁹

Some authors also assume that there were large differences in status between the groups just mentioned. For example, it is sometimes pointed out that community heads (*li-chang*) and tax captains (*liang-chang*) originally were allowed to wear the blue garments of officials, and that their families often married among each other.¹⁷⁰ Sometimes other kinds of evidence for distinctions in status are cited. There are, however, strong arguments against assuming that great differences in status existed among the rural population. Certainly, there were no legally established differences. Leaders who abused their influence by evading taxes and corvée were often punished later by the community (*li*) and the heaviest corvée obligations were assessed upon them as soon as their term was over.¹⁷¹

Organizing the land: land categories

For some earlier historians, the study of the Ming land system consisted mainly of a discussion of the way land was categorized in tax records; that is, whether it was private land (*min-t'ien*), official land (*kuan-t'ien*), land belong-

¹⁶⁸ See Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*.

¹⁶⁹ See, for example, Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka*, or Chang Hsien-ch'ing, "Ming-tai kuan-shen yu-mien." Of course, widescale public works might have entailed different practices.

¹⁷⁰ Even the *san-teng* classifications might have some influence in marriage patterns, see Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka*, p. 173.

¹⁷¹ As is mentioned in Okuzaki, *Chūgoku kyōshin jinushi*, ch. 6.

ing to a princely estate (*chuang-t'ien*), or the land of a military colony (*t'un-t'ien*). In this survey we deal mainly with the first two of those categories.¹⁷²

It must be said that in China the existence of the government's prerogative to confiscate land or to reassign it or its taxes to princely estates did not prevent land from readily being bought and sold or inherited. Customary practices regarding the sale of land favored purchase options of lineage-members or neighbors. In exceptional cases of disasters or amnesties, the government occasionally ordered landowners to lower rents.¹⁷³ Land prices depended on many factors in addition to productivity, including its social value, the tax system (including the tax system's corvée component), and the land-to-man ratio.¹⁷⁴

"Official," or to be more precise, government-owned land (*kuan-t'ien*)¹⁷⁵ had several origins. Some was land taken over from the Sung and the Yüan governments and derived ultimately from confiscation, forced occupation, purchase, or state-supervised reclamation. Some official land in Chiang-nan came from the early Hung-wu period confiscation of the possessions of powerful landlords who had supported the Ming founder's rival, Chang Shih-ch'eng, who had been based in eastern Kiangsu and northern Chekiang, and some came from land found at that time to be uncultivated. Such government-owned land averaged about 50 percent of all the taxed land throughout Chiang-nan. "Taxes" on this land (equivalent to "rent" paid to the government as its owner, augmented by taxes) were much higher than on private land, although the tax rates on official land were still much lower during the Ming dynasty than they had been during the Sung dynasty. For a typical example, in Soochow before 1430, taxes amounted to 4.4 *tou* per *mu* on official land, as compared with 0.4 to 0.6 *tou* per *mu* on private land. Nonetheless, that rate was lower than prevailing rents charged to tenants, which ran from 7 to 15 *tou* per *mu* (a *tou*, "peck," is one tenth of a picul, *shih* or *tan*).¹⁷⁶

172 See, among others, Mi Chu (Chü Mi) Wiens, "Changes in the fiscal and rural control systems in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries," *Ming Studies*, 3 (Fall 1976), pp. 53-69; Wu Tan-ko, "Ming-tai ti kuan-t'ien ho min-t'ien," *Chung-hua wen-shih lun-t'ung*, 1 (1979), pp. 119-63; Mori Masao, *Mindai Kōnan tochi seido*, and Kitamura, "Minmatsu-Shinsho ni okeru jinushi."

173 The latter power was lost or relinquished by the government only in the early Ch'ing period.

174 See "Minmatsu-Shinsho ni okeru jinushi ni tsuite," *Rekishiigaku Kenkyū* ([1949]) rpt. in Kitamura Hironao, *Shindai shakai keizaiishi kenkyū* (Kyōto, 1971), pp. 18-49, esp. p. 36.

175 Some authors translate it as "public land," which is a misnomer. It was not publicly owned as lakes or hilly land might be, but privately, with the state as owner, *kuan* having the sense of "imperial." It should be mentioned that, in the late Ming, *kuan-t'ien* also was used to mean "officials' land:" land owned by degree holders and exempted from corvée.

176 For an overview of the more exceptional land categories, see Li Lung-ch'ien, *Ming-Ch'ing ching-chi shih*, and Li Wen-chih, "Ming-Ch'ing shih-tai ti feng-chien t'u-ti so-yu-chih," *Ching-chi yen-chiu*, 8 (1963), pp. 67-77; 9 (1963), pp. 55-61. For some of the kinds of local problems the princely estates

Footnote continued on next page

RURAL ADMINISTRATION: CHANGES IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

Reforms countering tax and corvée evasion

The tax and corvée system as it was conceived in the late fourteenth century had many internal contradictions from the beginning: it hovered uncertainly between land-based and population-based criteria for tax collection; it was not designed to accommodate changes in the population, and did not anticipate a general increase in the population over time; it presumed a natural economy as the basis for calculating tax payments (92 percent of the summer tax and 99 percent of the autumn tax was to be collected in kind).¹⁷⁷ These characteristics might have been reasonable in the postwar situation of the early Ming, but they did not adapt well to a recovering economy.¹⁷⁸ Both internal and external pressures soon forced far-reaching changes in the taxation system.

Incentives to evade taxation altogether were always present for those able to make use of these internal contradictions. In the fifteenth century, the various means of tax evasion included: 1) *t'ou-hsien*, the attachment of one's lands to other powerful, mainly imperial, estates, which benefited de facto from many kinds of exemptions;¹⁷⁹ 2) *kuai-chi*, the registration of one's land in the name of a degree holder (sometimes, but not always a kinsman) who was exempt from irregular corvée, a practice that was usually accomplished in return for a fee paid to the degree holder, but was sometimes done even without his knowledge; and 3) *hua-fen*, the splitting of one's holdings by setting up more than one household, thereby changing

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could cause, see Satō Fumitoshi, "Minmatsu shakai to ōfu," in his *Minmatsu nōmin hanran no kenkyū* (1975–1982, rpt. Tokyo, 1985), pp. 152–260, and Wang Yü-ch'üan, "Ming-tai ti wang-fu chuang-t'ien," *Li-shih lun-ts'ung*, 1 (September 1964), pp. 219–305. For military colonies, see Foon Ming Liew, *Tumtian farming of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644)*, *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens*, Band 97 (Hamburg, 1984).

177 See, for example, Kitamura Hironao, "Minmatsu-Shinsho ni okeru jinushi ni tsuite," *Rekishiigaku Kenkyū* ([1949]) rpt. in his *Shindai shakai keizaishi kenkyū* (Kyoto, 1971), p. 21, for the last statement.

178 The unchanging quota-system for villages, not necessarily legal, which endured for a very long time, had the consequence of producing a layer between the government and the actual taxpayer. This was already noted by Furushima Kazuo, "Kyū Chūgoku ni okeru tochi shoyū to sono seikaku," *Chūgoku nōson kakumei no tenkai* (1972), rpt. in his *Chūgoku kindai shakaishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1982), pp. 3–33, esp. pp. 32–3, n. 21.

179 Depending on the status or wealth of the original commoner who attached his land to that of a privileged household, the relationship between them could vary from dependency (poor peasants exchanging tax and corvée obligations for perhaps demeaning tasks to be performed for their new boss) to equality (when richer commoners used their connections to degree-holding households to escape taxation).

a high category of assessment into several lower ones which might escape corvée altogether.¹⁸⁰

The case of the tax captains (*liang-chang*) can help clarify the kinds of consequences those changes could have. Originally, the post of the tax captain was to be rotated annually in a ten-year cycle: this implies that there was a sufficient number of households capable of providing the leadership and having the occasional material and social power necessary to ensure the fulfillment of the tasks associated with the post. The duties of tax captains, especially those in the Chiang-nan region, became much heavier when the Yung-lo emperor moved the capital to the North early in the 1420s, for that enormously increased the distance over which the tax grain had to be transported. There were ever fewer households able to provide those services, although for households powerful enough to pass on to those under their command the increasing burden of offering presents and bribes (including their own), the post remained a profitable one, especially since holding the tax captaincy in the early years of the dynasty was a direct stepping stone to official rank. During the Hsüan-te period (1425–35), fewer, but more powerful, households monopolized the post, and statutes were revised to reflect that change.¹⁸¹ Later in the fifteenth century, however, the examination system developed to the point where it became the exclusive route to official appointment. Consequently, in many areas the tax captaincy became less attractive to those whose family resources could give them access to the post.¹⁸² By the early sixteenth century, this decrease in the attractiveness of the tax captaincy resulted in many areas in an arrangement under which the captaincy was shared by several households at once. Such households, however, being much less prestigious, lacked the power to force the truly wealthy to pay

180 *T'ou-hsien* seems to have entailed more social relations than *kuei-chi*. See, for example, Kawakatsu, *Chügoku hōken kokoka*, p. 685. These terms, however, are sometimes used interchangeably. Also, the same term can apply to different social realities. See, for example, Sakai, *Chügoku zensho*. The articles of Shimizu Taiji, including his "Tōkenkō," *Tōa keizai kenkyū*, 11, No. 2 (April 1927), rpt. in his *Mindai tochi seidoshi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1968), pp. 385–404; his "Tōken to kiki no igi," *Chisei*, 8, No. 5 (October 1943), rpt. in *Mindai*, pp. 421–42; and his "Mindai ni okeru dendo no kiki," *Chisei*, 6, No. 4 (July 1941), also rpt. in his *Mindai*, pp. 443–58, still often cited, are now outdated. For the splitting up of households, see also n. 32.

181 The enormous increase in the distance to be covered by the *liang-chang* was decreased through several fifteenth-century changes such as *kai-tui* (changed [locales of] delivery) and finally, in 1471, the army corps took over the transport of some grain consignments. See Hoshi Ayao, *Mindai sōun no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1963), abstracted and trans. as *The Ming tribute grain system*, trans. Mark Elvin, Michigan Abstracts, 1 (Ann Arbor, 1969); and Ray Huang, *Taxation*.

182 We must also remember that even important and wealthy households could be ruined by holding a tax captaincy; one illustrative case is that of the high official Liu Ying (1442–1523). After his retirement, he once had an argument with a certain magistrate who, in retaliation, assigned him and other members of his family to seven *liang-chang* posts in order to bankrupt him. See Liang, *Ming-tai liang-chang chih-tu*, p. 67, n. 2, for the details.

their due. Whereas tax captains were to be chosen from households quite distinct in social and material power and renown, under these new arrangements the distinction between the tax captain (*liang-chang*) and the community head (*li-chang*) tended to blur, and the functions of the tax captain were often split off and absorbed into the lower-level community head (*li-chang*) functions.

The increase in landholdings belonging to large landlords, to merchants who moved off the land to live in towns,¹⁸³ or to landlords living elsewhere and therefore not fully accountable to the original community (*li*), put those landlords whose primary holdings were still in their original community (*li*) under great stress. Some powerful large landlords found they did better by passing the increases in tax and corvée assessments on to their tenants,¹⁸⁴ but custom often forbade that.

As early as the 1430s, major adjustments were made in the older *li-chia* system in the Chiang-nan region. The displacement of the capital from Nanking to Peking greatly increased the requirement for the labor corvée needed for grain transport. Mobility also led to the disappearance of many persons from the community (*li*) registers. Sources called these persons “extinct” or “fugitive,” but a report by Chou Ch’en (1381–1453), Provincial Governor in the Southern Metropolitan Region from 1430 to 1450, shows that many of those “extinct” households had not moved far away. Some had merely moved to a nearby sub-county (*hsiang*), some had attached themselves to military officers, some had migrated to prosperous transport towns, and some had taken service with the lucky law-breakers who had become rich by transforming their punitive post-station duties into lucrative commercial ventures.¹⁸⁵

Because rent and tax on official land was higher than on private land, tenants on official land had originally been exempted from all irregular corvée exactions as a compensation. However, with the increase in required labor service and the decrease in the number of households on the registers, such privileged treatment could no longer be continued. The exemption from

183 Whether this was actually a demographic process involving small-distance migration as many Japanese authors beginning with Kitamura and his “Jinushi” maintain; whether it involved basically just the transfer of land rights to the towns; or whether the movement to the towns was actual, but only a temporary stage in the life of degree holders or merchants (as assumed by proponents of a “rural-urban continuum”) is a matter of debate, but this does not affect the result for tax and corvée purposes. Doubtless all three scenarios occurred, especially if one takes care to note that the “towns” were often new rural economic and social centers and not necessarily county seats.

184 See Jerry Paul Dennerline, “Fiscal reform and local control: the gentry-bureaucratic alliance survives the conquest,” *Conflict and control in late imperial China*, eds. Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Carolyn Grant (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 86–120, and T’ang Wen-chi, *Ming-tai fu-i chih-tu shih*, pp. 130–37.

185 Mori Masao, “Jūgo seiki zenpan Soshūfu ni okeru yōeki rōdōsei no kaikaku,” *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronshū*, 41, *Shigaku* 14; Nakamura Eikō *kyōju taikan kinen* (March 1966), pp. 105–24; also, Mori, *Mindai Kōnan tochi seido*, ch. 3.

corvée was apparently sufficient to attract renter-operators to lease such lands. They then sub-leased them for normal private rents. Now the renter-operators also had to provide labor services, and several measures had to be taken to equalize the disparity in tax and corvée requirements that existed between private and official land. This equalization was accomplished in part by judiciously applying different conversion rates (which were used when taxes were allowed to be paid in money or in forms other than the stipulated tax grain) or by applying different wastage fees (*p'ing-mi*) to cover losses in transit. By means of such considerations, the tax grain burden on "official land" was decreased in 1433 by 20 percent to 30 percent.¹⁸⁶ In exchange, the owners of "official land" now also became subject to irregular service levies. Those measures were not confined to Chiang-nan; they were also extended to other regions where the amount of "official land" on the registers was substantial, as was the case in eastern Chekiang, Fukien, Kiangsi, and Hu-kuang.¹⁸⁷

The changes made in the methods of allocating irregular corvée obligations are of greater import than those in assessing taxes. The earlier system of making allocations ad hoc, whenever they were required and according to the often outdated household category system then in use, was changed in 1432 by establishing a kind of budget. "Miscellaneous" services were assessed yearly, whether service obligations were required that year or not and were payable once every ten years. This regularity was apparently welcomed.

The nominal tax unit was still the picul of rice, but the increasing monetization of the economy led to the transformation of many parts of the tax system to payment in money. This proved an incentive to increase commodity production. The use of different conversion rates for different categories of levies provided the state with the added advantage of a convenient mechanism for increasing taxes covertly and differentially as the range of services that needed to be performed for a growing population increased.¹⁸⁸

Such conversion methods (*che-na fa*) by which assessments expressed in piculs of rice were commuted to payment in other commodities pre-dated Chu Yüan-chang's founding of the Ming dynasty in 1368. Originally seen as a favor to the taxpayer – "*che*" implies "with a savings" (or discount) – conversion had required special permission that was granted when grain was not locally available, where transport was not adequate to move tax grain, when calamities had ruined the harvests, or accumulated arrearages had to

186 For these changes, see the works of Mori cited in the preceding note; Lai Hui-min, *Ming-tai Nan-chih-li fu-i chih-tu ti yen-chiu*, Wen-shih ts'ung-k'an, 63 (T'ai-pei, 1983); and Yü Wei-ming, *Ming-tai Chou Ch'en tui Chiang-nan ti ch'ü ching-chi she-hui ti koi-ko* (T'ai-pei, 1990).

187 According to some, Oyama, "Mindai ni okeru zeiryō," p. 319, for example, some changes in tax collection were made according to household categories, but the evidence is slight.

188 Huang, *Taxation*, p. 92, is more pessimistic.

be paid. The records that indicate which strata of society favored the conversion of taxes or corvée to payments in silver are somewhat contradictory: the poor seem to have favored it in some places, while in others, the rich did.¹⁸⁹ Which group favored conversion depended on the state of the economy at a particular place and time and on the distance of a village to the county seat. In general, the more remote areas preferred to make payments in silver even when it was rarer there, because doing so released farmers from long-term service duties that seriously conflicted with their agricultural work.

In 1436, supposedly as a temporary measure, payment of a portion of the tax grain levy in silver was first permitted and then later required in order to relieve the burden on military officials in Peking who encountered considerable losses when forced to sell their grain salaries in Nanking, where prices were low, only to have to re-purchase rice to meet their needs in Peking, where prices were higher.¹⁹⁰ Direct transport of their tax grain to Peking would have cost still more. Originally considered temporary, the practice was later continued and was extended to an ever wider range of taxes. The silver used for such payments later became known as *chin-hua-yin* (gold floral silver), a name given to silver of particularly high purity.¹⁹¹ More general conversions of the basic land taxes, however, were only permitted after conversion of corvée items became widespread, and they did not become regular until after 1490.¹⁹²

The change to a system of budgeting for irregular levies and corvée levies, and the impact of the increasingly monetized economy resulted in the first broad reform of the *li-chia* tax system under the name of the *chiin-yao-fa* (equalization of corvée service), first proposed province-wide for Kiangsi in 1443 by Hsia Shih (*chin-shih* of 1418; known for his knowledge of currency problems), where it was implemented and rescinded several times.¹⁹³ In 1450, it was revived in half a dozen provinces and was finally applied nationally from 1488 on.¹⁹⁴ This process, by which a rationally conceived administrative change was generally adopted and officially recognized, took more than half

189 See Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*. For example, the poor in Shang-yü (near Shao-hsing, Chekiang) county in the sixteenth century, and the rich in Hai-yen county during the same period.

190 See Shimizu Taiji, "Mindai ni okeru sozei ginnō no hattatsu," *Tōyō gakubō*, 22, No. 3 (1933), pp. 367–416; and also Yamane Yukio, "Ichijō benpō to chiteigin." In *Yuragu Chūka teikoku*, Sekai no rekishi, 11, ed. Chikuma shobō henshūbu (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 282–99, section 2.

191 Shimizu Taiji, *Chūgoku kinsei shakai keizai shi* (Tokyo, 1950).

192 In general, conversion rates were lower than the market price and were favorable to the taxpayers; see T'ang Wen-chi, *Ming-tai fu-i chih-tu shih*, pp. 195–96.

193 After locally having been attempted by K'ō Hsien, see T'ang Wen-chi, *Ming-tai fu-i chih-tu shih*, p. 228.

194 Other important names connected with this reform are Chu Ying (1417–85), working in Kwang-tung, Fukien, Shensi, and Ts'ui Kung (1409–79), working in Kiangsi and Chiang-nan.

a century. It inadvertently illustrates the great differences between the economic conditions in the North and in the South.

Fundamentally, this reform meant that a limited number of increasingly burdensome so-called irregular services, such as the provision of personal attendants, runners, horse grooms, academy servitors, instructors' cooks, and the like – especially those provided as personal services to magistrates or education officers – were calculated according to a budget.¹⁹⁵ These expenses (or equivalent actual services) were levied on those households comprising the equalized corvée neighborhood (*chün-yao-chia*), which was the group of neighborhood heads (*chia-shou*) who had taken their service turns five or in some cases three years earlier.¹⁹⁶ Instead of requiring performance of the services in person, a charge was collected in monetary form, usually in silver, to be used for hiring people to perform the services. Other services, such as those of storehouse keepers, jailers, and dispatch bearers, continued to be performed mostly in person.¹⁹⁷ The distribution of required services among the members of the equalized corvée neighborhood (*chün-yao-chia*) varied according to household ranking, and an attempt was made to match the weight of the service obligation to the ranking of the household that bore it. This could mean that a household of higher rank would be responsible for several duties, while a household of lower rank would be responsible for performing only part of some service.¹⁹⁸

In the South, however, the ranking of households according to wealth tended to disappear, and the equalized service levies (*chün-yao fa*) came to be assessed against landholding only.

The system was adopted rather later in the North. Since the North was poorer in a general sense than the South, it is probable that one service obligation per rotation each ten years simply did not provide enough personnel to fulfill the requirements for corvée labor. At the same time, the lack of silver

195 In Chinese: *chib-hou* (personal attendants), *tsao-li* (runners), *ma-fu* (horse grooms), *chai-fu* (academy servitors) and *shan-fu* (school cooks). The first two terms are often used interchangeably.

196 Here is a clear example where *chia* is no longer a term for the group out of which one household serves each year, but for the group of all households serving for one particular year.

197 Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*, ch. 2. In Chinese: *k'u-tzu* (storehouse keepers), *chin-tzu* (jail wardens) and *p'u-ping* (dispatch bearers).

198 While duties were burdensome, the percentage of households that had to perform them was quite low in any given year; in ten cases out of twenty-two listed by T'ang Wen-chi in *Ming-tai fu-i chib-tu shih* – see p. 125 – it was lower than 3 percent. The amount of an average *chün-yao-yin* payment in most cases constituted 0.05 to 0.1 *tael* of silver per (registered) person a year. See T'ang Wen-chi, *Ming-tai fu-i chib-tu shih*, pp. 246–47, table 35. Very often the payment was not paid by all registered households in a given year, and individual contributions, therefore, were higher. See also Iwami Hiroshi, “Min no Kasei zengo ni okeru fueki kaikaku ni tsuite,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 10, No. 5 (May 1949), pp. 1–25, and Oyama Masaaki, “Mindai Kahoku fu-eki seido kaikaku shi kenkyū no ichi kentō,” pp. 99–117.

in circulation in such areas tended to favor service performed in person instead of commutation of corvée to monetary form.

The commutation of the levies and the local public expenditures that were paid in kind into payments in silver that were to be provided by the community (*li-chia*) heads on duty in their decennial rotation usually preceded the commutation of the equalized service (*chün-yao*) obligations to payments in silver, although sometimes both processes occurred simultaneously. The silver payment that resulted from the former commutation was known most commonly by the name *li-chia-yin* (community silver), but other designations also occurred. While the government's officially budgeted and regularized allocations for expenses remained by and large constant (even though the government's actual requirements kept increasing), there was a chronic tendency to raise extra services in labor or money outside the original budget: only in the 1520s in Fukien did there appear a method for updating the budget on a yearly basis.¹⁹⁹

The tax and corvée system took several different paths of development in the North and in the South. The use of community silver (*li-chia-yin*) gained momentum in the North half a century later than it did in the South. Starting about 1500, a distinction was made between silver service levies (*yin-ch'ai*) and human labor service levies (*li-ch'ai*). Both terms continued to exist even after the labor service levies came to be measured in silver equivalents for ease of comparison and even later when both were sometimes actually paid in silver.

In the South, in most cases for which we have evidence, all these commuted payments of labor and corvée service were still to be paid once every ten years. While, in principle, the same total amount was paid every year, the total men (*ting*) and landholdings of different equalized service neighborhoods (*chün-yao-chia*) – and sometimes also of the administrative community (*li-chia*) on duty – were not similar. As a result, the next move towards more equality entailed the addition of all landholdings (*mu*) and able-bodied males (*ting*) of all the households that would serve during the decade and the assessment every year of exactly one tenth of this figure. This could be done within a community (*li*) by disregarding the original household-based neighborhood (*chia*) divisions; but, more often than not, it took place over a whole district. In this case, even the original community (*li*) divisions were ignored. First

199 This was called the *pa-fen-fa* (eight-part method), inaugurated by Shen Cho (*chin-shih* of 1508), and applied only to the tributary levies; other public expenditures were still provided for by the *li-chia* on duty. See Yamane, *Mindai yōkei seido*, pp. 136–40. But this method also had to be updated by 1537.

put into practice around 1460 in Fukien, this approach became more prevalent after 1510 under the name *shih-tuan-fa* (ten-sector system).²⁰⁰

The tax and corvée system in the North took another turn: there equalized corvée (*chün-yao*) regularization meant a yearly assessment of all silver and labor requirements on a certain jurisdictional level against all the households in that level (mostly at the county level). Instead of a large payment once a decade, smaller payments were made every year.²⁰¹ The payments were not, however, assessed directly on landholdings as was the case in the South. Silver payments were now made under an even more elaborate nine household grade system and were called *men-yin* (courtyard-gate silver), the system being consolidated in 1479. Labor services were directly assessed against the number of adult (male) persons (*ting*) per household and calculated (but not necessarily paid) in silver known as *ting-yin* (adult male silver). There were usually not many households in the highest categories, and the vast majority was in the lowest category. As one example from the North in the sixteenth century, in Wen-an county near Tientsin (T'ien-chin) in modern Ho-peï, in 1586, the nine ranks of households, in descending order, contained the following numbers of households: 0; 0; 0; 25; 157; 620; 1232; 2672; and 9777.²⁰² (See Figure 9.5; other examples are numerous.)

The other corvée services that remained were also gradually regularized, commuted, budgeted, and assessed according to household category. In the fifteenth century, such corvée services became ever more specialized and reduced in scope, since they had to be performed by households that generally had less wealth and power than was formerly the case. This specialization occurred whether the services were performed in person or were performed through the payment of fees used by the state to hire someone to perform them. The administrative records show a proliferation of terminology being used to designate the specialized tasks that were taking the place of what formerly had been general categories of service. For example, the term *t'ang-chang* was used from the 1460s on to designate the heads of polders, which

200 The Fukien system, not yet known under the later name, was initiated by Sheng Yung (1418–92, in Fukien from 1457 to 1464). More typical was the method of a vice-magistrate, Ma, around 1500–10 in Wu-chin county (seat in Ch'ang-chou, Chiang-nan), who used equal weights of *ting* and *mu*. Because any one household probably had many more *mu* than *ting*, the *mu* was greatly emphasized. See Yamane, *Mindai yōkei seido*, ch. 2, p. 123. See also Liang Fang-chung, "Ming-tai shih-tuan-chin-fa," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih chi-k'ao*, 7, No. 1 (1944), pp. 120–37, trans. as "The 'ten-parts' tax system of Ming." In *Chinese social history in translations of selected studies*, eds. and trans. E-tu Zen (Jen I-tu) Sun and John deFrancis, American Council of Learned Societies – Studies in Chinese and Related Civilizations, No. 7 (1957), pp. 270–80.

201 The latter system was not always welcomed: T'ang Shun-chih (1507–60), for example, was a great proponent of the once-a-decade method. See DMB, pp. 1252–56. Also see Liang Fang-chung, "The 'ten-parts' tax system of Ming."

202 Also see n. 234.

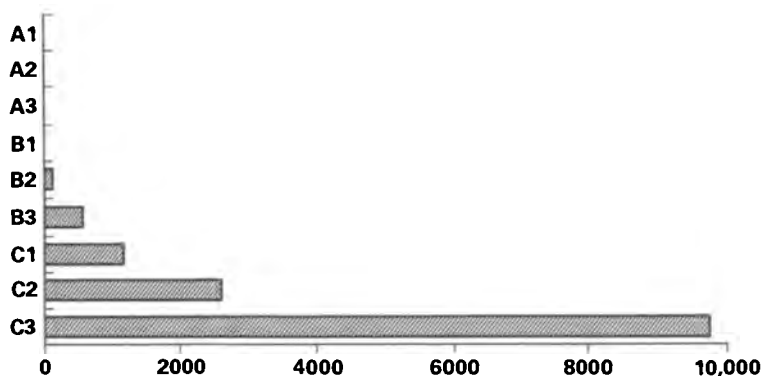


Fig. 9.5. The distribution of household categories in 1586 Wen-an

were much smaller than the former administrative communities (*li*); the functions of the community leader (*li-chang*) became split up into the more specialized tasks of the tax-prompter (*fen-ts'ui*), the accountant (*shu-shou*), or the community leader (*li-chang*) serving at the county seat. In some cases, a community leader (*li-chang*) himself might hold a succession of those titles and perform some of the duties associated with the post for three or four years out of ten.²⁰³ The officers bearing the title *tsung-chia* (lit. neighborhood chief) performed police functions for their community (*li*). It is noteworthy that they were responsible for all inhabitants within their territories, not just those registered as being under the jurisdiction of the community (*li-chia*), a fact that provides unequivocal evidence for the existence of a nontaxed immigrant population. That police function was added to the community (*li*) starting in 1436.²⁰⁴

The functions the tax captain (*liang-chang*) performed also were subdivided and assigned to delivery households (*chieh-hu*), general tax-prompters (*tsung-ts'ui*), southern transport households (*nan-yün-hu*), and northern transport households (*pei-yün-hu*). These changes in the nature of corvée service refer mainly to the South; but similar changes also occurred in the North.²⁰⁵ In sixteenth-century Yü-chou (modern Fang-ch'eng, in southern Honan), there

203 Oyama, "Fu-eki seido no henkaku," pp. 334–35.

204 Sakai Tadao, "Mindai zen-chūki no hōkōsei ni tsuite." In *Shimizu hakushi tsuitō kinen: Mindaisbi ronsō*, ed. Shimizu hakushi tsuitō kinen henshū iinkai (Tokyo, 1962), pp. 577–610; and Maeda Tsukasa, "Rikōsei seiritsu no katei." Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*, p. 63, mentions the beginning of *tsung-chia* in Yen-p'ing (Fukien) in 1447. See also Iwami, *Mindai yōeki seido*, esp. pp. 192–200.

205 The decrease in average landholding was also a factor there that led to the subdivision of duties; contemporary writers state that "the wealthiest households nowadays are not like those of earlier days."

were finally six great households (*ta-hu*) in every community (*li*), while originally there had been one great household (*ta-hu*) for several communities!²⁰⁶

In one respect, the North had fewer problems than the South. There were fewer nonresident households (*chi-chuang-hu*) perhaps, it has been suggested, because southern water transport was easier and less expensive than land transport in the North: a situation that resulted in more compact and economically more inwardly oriented villages in the North.²⁰⁷

Reforms countering community breakdown

New formal organizations: Pao-chia and Hsiang-yüeh

The community functions required in the statutes from the administrative community (*li-chia*) probably deteriorated under the conditions that have been discussed. To summarize: there was increased migration of the wealthy to the rural towns and cities, coupled with capital movement from rural investments into market town and city-based activities. Absentee landlordship by landlords residing in other rural jurisdictions, or often in urban settings, increased. The marked increase in commercial activities led landlords and tenants alike to give paramount attention to their own interests at the expense of matters of concern to the whole community, and this trend can be seen in the decrease in mutual assistance given by landlords and tenants to one another.²⁰⁸ Although it is not fully reflected in the sources, there was a general decrease in the land per person ratio, which no doubt left a smaller margin of rural productivity to provide the prestige and material well-being needed to support the work of those who provided rural public services. At the same time, the state became less interested in community functions because tax and corvée collection were becoming increasingly problematic and were drawing all its attention to these more vital fiscal issues.

Yet we really do not know the extent to which the community functions of these posts were diminished, since these functions could continue under

206 See Taniguchi, "Mindai Kahoku no 'taiko.'"

207 Obata Tatsuo, "Kōnan ni okeru rikō no hensei ni tsuite," *Shirin*, 39, No. 2 (March 1956), pp. 1–35, quoting Chao Hsi-hsiao (early Ch'ing). For measures against the *chi-chuang-hu*, see below. Simply prohibiting them, as happened in 1451, was not effective. See Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka*, p. 165.

208 See Mori Masao, "Min-Shin jidai no tochi seido," *Higashi Ajia sekai no tenkai II*, Iwanami kōza Sekai rekishi 12: Chūsei 6 (Tokyo, 1971), pp. 229–74. For the frequent contemporary accounts of community breakdown, see his "Minmatsu no shakai kankai ni okeru chitsujo no hendō ni tsuite;" also see Hsü Hung, "Ming-tai hou-ch'i Hua-pei shang-p'in ching-chi ti fa-chan yü she-hui feng-ch'i ti pien-ch'ien." In *Ti-erh-tz'u Chung-kuo chin-tai ching-chi-shih hui-i*, ed. Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan ching-chi yen-chiu-so (T'ai-pei, 1989), Vol. 1, pp. 107–73; and Hsü Hung, "Ming-tai she-hui feng-ch'i ti pien-ch'ien – i Chiang, Che ti-ch'ü wei li." In *Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan ti-erh-chieh kuo-chi Han-shueh hui-i lun-wen-chi* (Dec. 29–31, 1986–Ch'ing-chu Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan yüan ch'ing liu-shih chou-nien): *Ming-Cb'ing yü chin-tai shih tsu*, ed. Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan (Taipei, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 137–59.

individuals who did not want to be sullied or burdened with an increasingly corvée-like and exploited sub-official post. The loss of officially supported outward manifestations of communal life, such as the ceremony in which leaders and people joined in reciting the *Placard of people's instructions* (*Chiao-min pang-wen*), had become complete by the late fifteenth century.²⁰⁹ That does not mean, however, that there was a cessation of mutual aid for funerals, that there was less attention paid to communal drainage and diking works, to pumping irrigation water or draining off excess water, or to other activities of paramount importance to the community and the locality. Although there were problems with the officially designated elders, there was a growing group of informal local leaders.²¹⁰ The new situation, which was becoming ever more obvious, was simply that the administrative community (*li*) was becoming a paper organization more than a functioning reality in society. With the promulgation of the ten sector system (*shih-tuan-fa*) reforms (see above) in late fifteenth-century Fukien and with the substitution of payment in silver for service functions of the administrative community (*li-chia*), the community, if it had not disappeared altogether, was transformed. It became, at most, that segment of a locality's population liable for certain taxes and corvée. It was no longer a territorial unit comprised of all of the inhabitants of that area.

Nevertheless, the deterioration of the village elders (*li-lao*) institution in many areas appears to have created a noticeable vacuum. Concerned officials and people who were locally influential started to promote imitations of former community associations. This impulse took two forms: the organization of villages for defense through implementing *pao-chia* (local mutual security associations, organized in parallel to the community [*li-chia*]); and for moral elevation through the *hsiang-yüeh* (village covenants).

The community (*li-chia*) system was self-managing, but neither self-determining, nor autonomous. It had never included any provision for self-defense and it had increasingly turned its back upon its original responsibilities for legal matters, for guiding local morality, for spurring community self-improvement, and for maintaining ethical and institutional rules. Even the community (*li-chia*) system's original defensive regulations were aimed at nothing more than controlling wandering beggars and nefarious clerks.²¹¹

As early as 1436–37 in some places, efforts were made to institute local police systems, often called *tsung-chia*, based on the registration of an entire

209 Okuzaki, *Chūgoku kyōshin jinushi*.

210 Kuribayashi, *Rikōsei no kenkyū*. Wu Cheng-han, "The temple fairs in late imperial China" (Diss., Princeton University, 1988), provides case studies of the emergence of new local leaders, non-gentry and nonsub-official, as heads of local cult and shrine organizations.

211 Sakai, "Mindai zen-chūki no hōkōsei."

local populace into units of ten and 100 households; these systems attempted to include all inhabitants, including migrants, whether or not they were on community (*li-chia*) registers. Participation, although not voluntary, was not seen as a corvée duty; therefore, no exceptions were allowed.²¹² The eminent philosopher-statesman, Wang Yang-ming (or Wang Shou-jen, 1472–1529), used the idea of the local security system (*pao-chia*), significantly militarizing²¹³ it for local defense purposes. Such efforts at organization exposed the fact that in some cases the word for households (*hu*) had come to mean lineages, not families, and that other words designating the small family (“doors,” “cooking units,” etc.) had to be substituted in order to encompass the entire population. This situation revealed that the local community (*li-chia*) registers had not been updated for a long time and could not provide a realistic representation of the actual inhabitants of a locale or of their household structures. In one sense, therefore, the development of the local security system (*pao-chia*) was a territorial and demographic updating of the community (*li-chia*) system, not a totally different endeavor as some scholars have assumed.²¹⁴

The village covenant rules espoused an association formed among villagers for mutual exhortation and mutual assistance, led by an organized local leadership, and maintained through regular meetings and contributions. The idea of such covenants spread from the South to the North. In most cases the proposed territorial boundaries within which a given covenant would be in force were coextensive with pre-existing commune (*she*), canton (*tu*), or community (*li*) divisions. Immigrants within those boundaries were included.²¹⁵ The most famous late Ming system is perhaps the one proposed about 1590 by the eminent official and thinker, Lü K'un, initially as a defense against banditry in Shansi. Participation in this system was to be voluntary and was to exclude degree holders at the top of the social hierarchy and hired laborers

212 Yü Ch'ien (1398–1457); for example, called for a return to territorial units comprising *all* inhabitants, as the *li* originally had been. See Sakai, “Mindai zen-chūki no hōkōsei,” and Yü's biography in *DMB*, pp. 1608–12. The *tsung-* (and smaller *hsiao-*) *chia* were more rural in contrast to earlier police stations, *hsün-chien-ssu*, that had already been present in some locally important towns in the early Ming. In a bizarre twist, one of the first *tsung-chia*, Teng Mao-ch'i (d. 1449), later became the leader of an important Fukien rebellion. See Tanaka Masatoshi, “Minpen-kōso nuhen.” In *Yuragu Chūka teikoku*, Sekai no rekishi, 11, ed. Chikuma shobō henshūbu (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 41–80, tr. as “Popular uprisings, rent resistance, and bondservant rebellions in the late Ming.” *State and society in China – Japanese perspectives on Ming–Qing social and economic history*, trans. Joseph McDermott; eds. Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 165–214; also see Teng's biography in *DMB*, pp. 1275–77.

213 See his biography in *DMB*, pp. 1408–16.

214 For some of the more famous examples, see, among others, Wada Sei, *Chūgoku chihō jichi battatsushi*, and Shimizu Morimitsu, *Chūgoku kyōson shakai ron*. They are summarized in Paul Oscar Elmquist, “Rural controls in early modern China” (Diss., Harvard University, 1963). Many regulations are rather similar to the *li-chia* rules.

215 The *li* actually seem here to shape later social arrangements, as they would also sometimes shape marketing structures. Also see Brook, “Spatial structure.”

or tenants at the bottom. The hired laborers and tenants were to be enrolled under their masters.²¹⁶ A covenant was to include about one hundred “honest and decent” families, which were, if necessary, to be drawn from more than one community. The leadership was not to be by rotation, but was to remain permanently fixed, perhaps reflecting a less mobile, relatively underdeveloped area. Lü K’un’s ideas spurred others to propose similar systems. One ought to note that village rules called *hsiang-yüeh* that were down-to-earth and that had no Confucian overtones had existed previously. Their links with these Ming ideals of community organization are not clear, however, and await further investigation.²¹⁷

Village covenants and village defense systems in the late Ming were often supplemented by village schools and village granaries. In such cases these units might be smaller, as in the case of one proposed by Wang T’ing-hsiang (1474–1544)²¹⁸ and approved in 1529. Twenty to thirty families were to provide one granary for their communal needs.²¹⁹ Granary proposals underwent some change after the 1530s, apparently receiving significant local support and religious backing. Temples were chosen as the main locations for holding meetings, which were held on the religiously significant fifteenth day and last day of the lunar month. The founding emperor’s six moral exhortations in his *Placard of people’s instruction* (*Chiao-min pang-wen*) made a comeback and served as the basis for sermons or homilies. By the end of the sixteenth century, many counties, especially in Chiang-nan, had founded separate covenant buildings in which to hold those lectures.²²⁰ These scattered but persistent developments indicate a widespread sense of social need for some kind of community organization similar to, if not entirely duplicating, the administrative community (*li*) of the early Ming, which had changed its appearance because of social, demographic, and administrative trends. The local security systems (*pao-chia*) and the village covenants (*hsiang-yüeh*) were the favored vehicles for achieving some kind of community organization. Despite some sporadic approval from the government, however, none of the new systems was ever widely adopted. A more nationwide implementation of this sort of adjunct to local governance would only occur in the decades following the establishment of the Ch’ing dynasty in 1644.

216 The exclusion of degree holders was meant to forestall problems of etiquette; however, cooks and runners, often seen as “base,” were allowed.

217 See Elmquist, “Rural controls,” and Niida’s articles cited in n. 143. For Lü K’un, see also Joanna Handlin, *Action in Late Ming thought – the reorientation of Lü K’un and other scholar-officials* (Berkeley, 1983).

218 See the biography in *DMB*, pp. 1431–34.

219 Kuribayashi, *Rikōsei no kenkyū*.

220 See Okuzaki, *Chūgoku kyōshin jinkushū*.

Water control

Water management was a most important community function; in discussing it, one must include a discussion of the relations of villages with each other, their groupings in irrigation circles, and other hotly debated issues. Villages and irrigation communities were not identical, although there is a clear relationship between the two.²²¹ In some cases around the country, cooperation for purposes of irrigation was organized along an entire segment of a waterway. In those instances, more than one hundred villages cultivating more than 1000 *ch'ing* of land could cooperate as one unit.²²² In most of these cases, villages rather than individual households constituted the basic work unit. Villages that constituted irrigation work units could assess their members' households. This ability reveals some kind of communal authority. In the North, even tenants were subject to these assessments. However, in most cases during the Ming, irrigation cooperation involved only from one to three villages,²²³ and we hear of governmental intervention only in cases where things went wrong (which perhaps happened increasingly).

During the sixteenth century, in keeping with the general trend for splitting higher-level community and corvée functions, the polder heads (*t'ang-chang*) became more numerous and became responsible for smaller areas. At this time, they were increasingly exploited by local officials and were often assigned to posts away from their home localities to perform other kinds of tasks. Attempts were made to commute their services to payments in silver, but some polder heads (*t'ang-chang*) preferred to serve in person. In other cases, the money paid for commutation was not used for its intended purposes. As Morita Akira has astutely observed, the problems of irrigation management during the sixteenth century were not so much institutional or technological, but social: they reflected a general increase in mismanagement.²²⁴

But in the matter of irrigation management, as in other matters, the sixteenth-century problems of mismanagement were gradually solved in

221 Some are convinced that there was a Japanese-style strong irrigation community in the North; others deny this. Other discussions revolve around whether these systems were imposed from above, or not, or whether they were coterminous with other groupings – for example, religious associations – or were simply temporary “associations” for one particular purpose. For this discussion, see Morita Akira, “Min-Shin jidai no suiri dantai – sono kyōdōtaiteki seikaku ni tsuite,” *Rekishi kyōiku*, 13, No. 9 (September 1965), pp. 32–37.

222 The first example is from Ho-pei (Hsing-t'ai, seat of Shun-te prefecture), the second from Fukien (P'u-t'ien, seat of Hsing-hua prefecture). See Morita, “Min-Shin jidai no suiri dantai.”

223 Morita, “Min-Shin jidai no suiri dantai,” p. 36.

224 Morita Akira, “Minmatsu ni okeru tōchōsei no henkaku,” *Tōhōgaku* 26, (1963), rpt. in his *Shindai suirishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1974), pp. 450–71.

some places during the late Ming. The functions of the polder head (*t'ang-chang*), which was a corvée duty and therefore a position that was despised or evaded, were taken over by a kind of tax farmer: the *ni-t'ou* (literally translated, "mud-chief"). As with other administrative innovations, there were efforts to outlaw mud-chiefs because the practice of tax-farming seemed to be illegal,²²⁵ but eventually the fact that mud-chiefs were able to accomplish what needed to be done prevailed. The mud-chief position was officially recognized and made its appearance in the gazetteers. The issue of which position, the mud-chief (*ni-t'ou*) or the polder head (*t'ang-chang*), was more workable seems to have hinged not so much on whether the practice of having mud-chiefs was better than the earlier polder head (*t'ang-chang*) system institutionally, but rather on the issue of the quality of those who held these positions. When the persons functioning as irrigation managers were honest men, community functions were performed adequately. The sense of crisis that pervaded the early seventeenth century appears to have led to an increased number of such responsible functionaries where previously in some places the local great landlords, the notorious *hao-yu*, had had the power to usurp the functions of these positions for their own benefit.²²⁶

The single-whip reforms: simplifying the budget

It is often said that the so-called single-whip method (*i-t'iao-pien fa*) was the most important development in the Ming tax structure. In fact, it is difficult to single out any one specific approach among all the local reforms that took place as being uniquely identifiable as the single-whip method. In addition, the content of those reforms known as the single-whip reforms was as varied as was the content of the previous widespread reforms carried out under the equalized corvée levies (*chün-yao fa*).²²⁷

Although new tax procedures emerged from the process of change, it may be that the single most important feature of the process was the new land sur-

225 Chou K'ung-chiao (*chin-shih* of 1580) tried to prohibit it. See, for example, Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*, pp. 186–91.

226 Morita Akira, "Minmatsu ni okeru tōchōsei."

227 In one extreme case, all that was amalgamated were the *collection dates* of the tax and corvée payments. See Liang Fang-chung's "I-t'iao-pien-fa," *Chung-kuo chin-tai ching-chi-shih yen-chiu chi-k'ao*, 4, No. 1 (May 1936), pp. 1–65, and his "Shih i-t'iao pien-fa," *Chung-kuo chin-tai ching-chi-shih yen-chiu chi-k'ao*, 7, No. 1 ([1944]), both articles trans. in Wang Yü-ch'uan [Wang Yü-ch'uan] trans., *The single-whip method of taxation in China*, Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1 (Cambridge, Mass., 1970). See also Kuribayashi Nobuo, "Ichijō benpō no keisei ni tsuite." In *Shimizu hakushi tsuitō kinen* (*Mindaishi ronsō*, ed. Shimizu hakushi tsuitō kinen henshū iinkai (Tokyo, 1962), pp. 115–37, and Fujii Hiroshi, "Ichijō benpō no ichi sokumen." In *Wada hakushi kanreki kinen Tōyōshi ronsō*, ed. Wada hakushi kanreki kinen Tōyōshi ronsō hensan iinkai (Tokyo, 1951), pp. 571–90.

vey that accompanied it in 1581, because this survey became the basis on which all varieties of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century reforms would be implemented. The various features of the so-called single-whip method mentioned in the ground-breaking study by Liang Fang-chung, published in 1936,²²⁸ including the assessment of some corvée items against landholdings, annual levies instead of decennial ones, tax collection by government officials rather than by corvée labor, the amalgamation of various tax and corvée items into one payment, and the simplification of the categories of land to achieve a uniform levy, had already been going on, often separately, for a century under different names. Except for the amalgamation in one form or another of tax or corvée items into a single payment, these features were not in all cases necessary parts of those reforms which eventually were called “single-whip” reforms in documentary sources. Rather than trying to find by induction a unitary theme among all the reforms that were dubbed “single-whip,” it is more useful to identify all the different strands of reform that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, realizing that many different combinations of these practices appeared under a variety of different names.

We can then retain most of the features Liang Fang-chung describes, along with those characteristics of the equalized corvée levy (*chün-yao-fa*) reforms that have already been mentioned. I would add though, as one of the most important features of the single-whip method, that levies, whether on able-bodied males (*ting*) or on land, came now to be collected on a countywide basis and often involved more precise budgeting than had previously been practiced. This feature reflects the increased importance of the county-level of government at the expense of the sub-county, sub-official institution of the community (*li*). Henceforth, the growing anti-tax movements by the gentry were also organized on a countywide level.

Local differences in approach remained great, as counties experimented to the end of the century with ways of simplifying tax assessment and collection, usually with the tacit approval of the central government.²²⁹ Confusion was most conspicuous with respect to the corvée payments, and reforms were relatively more important in this area. The equalized corvée (*chün-yao*) silver payments were amalgamated in many places with the administrative community (*li-chia*) silver payments, regular levy silver payments, and irregular

²²⁸ Liang, *The single-whip method*.

²²⁹ See Shimizu Taiji, *Chūgoku kinsei shakai keizai shi*. Fairly complete amalgamations include 1578 Fukien, 1578 Ho-nan, 1583 Ch'i-men (Hui-chou prefecture), and 1592 Hua-yin (Shensi). See also Yamane, *Mindai yōkei seido*; Liang, *The single-whip method*; and Liang Fang-chung, “Ming-tai i-t'iao-pien-fa nien-piao (ch'u kao),” *Ling-nan hsieh-pao*, 12, No. 1 (December 1952), pp. 15–49; rpt. in his *Liang Fang-chung ching-chi shih lun-wen-chi* (Pei-ching, 1989), pp. 485–576.

duty payments. Sometimes amalgamation of these assessments was put into practice so quickly that the question of hiring labor replacements for what had been corvée services was not adequately addressed. When that happened, some labor corvée requirements were reinstated, without, however, abolishing the replacement fees — a favorite way for the government to raise payments.²³⁰

While assessment against all *ting* and *mu* in an entire county was common, making the community (*li*) at most an unimportant adjunct to the system, it is not always clear whether payments were made on an annual basis, or once a decade as in the ten-sector system (*shih-tuan-fa*).

Taxes and other payments had been paid up to this point through the community (*li-chia*) men on duty. With the widespread adoption of silver, these men were less needed for transport of taxes and more likely to commit mischief, so magistrates began to experiment with individual payments to tax chests set up at strategic places. Household heads were allowed to put their amalgamated payments in sealed envelopes and to deposit them in such chests. This practice began in 1567 in Yü-yao, Chekiang²³¹ and quickly spread throughout the whole province. The process was overseen and the deposits were recorded, though not checked, by chest-heads (*kuei-t'ou*) hired by the government, or still in some cases by community leaders (*li-chang*), or in the North by the great households (*ta-hu*). Delivery from the points of collection to granaries was taken over completely by the government.²³²

Once tax payments and corvée had been amalgamated, the items scheduled for payment in silver were assessed against acreage (*mu*) and able-bodied males (*ting*) according to formulae that differed from place to place. In the South especially, all corvée payments almost always came to be paid in practice according to the amount of land owned. Land categories themselves were first converted according to certain formulae into standardized tax *mu* to make the silver payments per actual *mu* more equitable: poorer land was counted as smaller, and richer land as larger for tax *mu* purposes, so that one equal official silver payment was obtained per tax *mu*.

In the North, the single-whip reform constituted a much greater break with tradition. There, as we have seen, the household categories of tax assessment remained intact and were forcefully defended as being heir to older T'ang, Sung, and Ming practices.²³³ There was widespread opposition to the equal-

230 As in 1537 Su-chou, Sung-chiang, and Ch'ang-shou prefectures.

231 See Kuribayashi, "Ichijō benpō," section 3.

232 See Taniguchi, "Mindai Kahoku no 'taiko'." In Tung-ch'ang prefecture (seat in Liao-ch'eng, Shantung) collection and transport was completely taken over by the government in 1628.

233 See Oyama, "Mindai Kahoku fu-eki seido" and Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*.

ization of payments according to land, which was the usual practice in the South. The lowest category of household, which had been officially exempt, could comprise some 90 percent of an area's population in the North and would have become liable for payments if southern precedents had been followed.²³⁴

The single-whip method also caused problems because silver was less available in the North, while nonlandholding wealth was relatively more important. Privately owned land became more of a liability *vis-à-vis* other investments, and there are reports of cultivable land laying fallow.²³⁵

One of the unintended results of the increased importance of landholding as a basis for tax and corvée assessment was the incentive it gave to evading the land registers. In locales where the once-a-decade system was maintained and not mitigated by a ten-sector method, the practice of constantly re-registering land to currently unassessed landowners (*no-i*) increased, as did the practice of false registration under exempted land or people (*kuai-chi*).²³⁶ Landlords had even greater incentives to buy land elsewhere, where they were not legally liable for corvée: landholding by non-resident landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*) increased enormously.

In their most advanced form, the single-whip reforms took over some elements of the ten-sector system (*shih-tuan-fa* – which treated a whole county as a unit, and used formulae that gave different weights to males [*ting*] and acreage [*mu*]) and the northern tax assessment methods that were based upon household categories (yearly assessments instead of rotation).²³⁷ County-wide budgets were made up every three to five years on the basis of actual

²³⁴ See, for example, the Tsou-hsien (Shantung) distribution of *ting* in Wan-li times (*ting* exempt because of degree holding are added in brackets): 8(5), 1(1), 1(1), 10(5), 32(17), 57(27), 272(94), 3402(357), 31723(691). See Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*. It is clear from this that higher households had comparatively more privileges. In another example, given by Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka*, p. 401, table VI–2, there were only 69 *ting* for the highest six classes, and 29,376 for the lowest class. In the South, limits below which one was exempt from corvée were more often set according to landholding and decreased over time. In Nanking, the limit was at first 100 and later 10 to 20 *mu*. See Liang, *The single-whip method*. In Su-chou, it was 10; in K'un-shan, 40 *mu*.

²³⁵ See, in this context, Iwami Hiroshi, "Santō keikairoku" ni tsuite." In *Shimizu hakushi tsuitō kinen: Mindaisbi ronsō*, ed. Shimizu hakushi tsuitō kinen henshū iinkai (Tokyo, 1962), pp. 197–220, trans. as "An introduction to the Shantung jinghuilu," trans. Helen Dunstan, in *State and society in China – Japanese perspectives on Ming–Qing social and economic history*, eds. and trans. Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 311–33; or Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*, p. 212, n. 26.

²³⁶ See Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*, ch. 2, pp. 102ff. Fees to the exempted person were often required to do this: see Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*, p. 122, or Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*, ch. 4. The going rate was 0.3 *tael/mu* in Chiang-nan. The gentry therefore gained material benefits by allowing *kuai-chi*. See Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*, p. 258, n. 36, against what Dennerline maintains in "Fiscal reform."

²³⁷ In Wen-chou prefecture, Chekiang, there was even an otherwise obscure method called ten-sections-single-whip, Yamane, *Mindai yōeki seido*.

²³⁸ See, for example, the Liu Kuang-chi reforms discussed in Liang, *The single-whip method*; and in Iwami, *Mindai yōeki seido*, pp. 127–28.

past expenses.²³⁸ The community (*li*) only survived as a unit there where the community leaders (*li-chang*) and others were still used for tax collection and recruited according to the old community numbers. But it was no longer a tax unit with tax and corvée quotas. A final blow to the original system, if not to its terminology, occurred when the duties of one community leader (*li-chang*), mostly tax deliveries, were assessed according to a certain fixed amount of land (that is, the total acreage [*mu*] per county was used to determine the total number of community leaders [*li-chang*]) without regard to earlier territorial divisions. This approach was used even if the new area (called a *mu-li*) was for all practical purposes still composed of a single compact area of land that did not include parcels of land dispersed elsewhere.

Although it simplified actual payments by taxpayers, the single-whip system increased rather than decreased paperwork since all the items newly amalgamated for accounting purposes still had to be redistributed on paper among all the sundry categories of tax and corvée items that had existed since early Ming times. A clear example is seen in Wu-chiang county (southern Kiangsu) in 1538.²³⁹ Different categories of land were converted into tax *mu* during the equal grain tax (*chün-liang*) reforms. A later reform, the equal corvée (*cheng-i*) reform, gave one rate per fiscal *mu* for each corvée item. On paper, this calculation was very complicated. In the first stage, original tax grain payments, and later, surtaxes, were given a different rate for each existing category; also, the ratio of silver to payment in kind varied widely. The result of pages and pages of calculations was that all of the original categories of tax and corvée were maintained and could be reported to the higher authorities. Every fiscal *mu* ended up in 1542 paying the same amount of 0.0376 *tan* per *mu*, of which 0.02 *tan* was paid in kind and the rest converted into 0.09 *taels* of silver. The great majority of normal land belonged to one and the same class, despite the bewildering confusion on the books.²⁴⁰ Every step of the reform entailed difficulties for some taxpayers, and some opposition arose. After all, although one equal payment per *mu* made tax payment

239 See Mori Masao, "Jūgo seiki zenpan Taiko shūhen chitai ni okeru kokka to nōmin," *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyūronshū, Shigaku*, 13 (March 1965), pp. 51–126; and Mori, *Mindai Kōnan tochi seido*, especially ch. 5. Famous names connected with these reforms are Ou-yang To (1487–1544), Chao Ying (in Chia-hsing from 1547–49) and Wang I (*chin-shih* of 1523; prefect in Su-chou in 1537). Another very illuminating example of such efforts to use conversion methods to equalize throughout actual payments per *mu* while maintaining on paper the great variety of older categories is given by T'ang Wen-chi, *Ming-tai fu-i chih-tu shih*, pp. 161–62. The example is from Hu-chou in 1519.

240 Mori Masao, "Jūroku seiki Taiko shūhen chitai ni okeru kanden seido no kaikaku 16," *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 21, No. 4 (March 1963), pp. 58–92; 22, No. 1 (July 1963), pp. 67–87; updated and rpt. in Mori Masao, *Mindai Kōnan tochi seido*, p. 82, n. 4. Corvée payments here were 0.03 *tael* per *ting* and 0.012 *tael* per *mu*, resulting for a five *mu*, two *ting* typical household in 0.024 *tan* per *mu*. In other places in this region, however, corvée in person could rival the commuted part, as, for example, in Chia-ting (see Iwami, "Min no Kasei zengo"): commuted levies counted for 11 percent, commuted services for 40 percent, and the silver equivalent for labor services for 49 percent.

simpler, it did not change the differences in productivity between areas. Moreover, most of the blatant differences in taxes and corvée had already become reflected in land prices. Despite these problems, the new late Ming categories and systems basically became the foundation of the Ch'ing system.

Those for whom all these reforms brought no relief were those who performed the most onerous labor service assignments. Relief was not forthcoming for the grain delivery households, the cloth delivery households, or the granary attendants, for example.²⁴¹ Expenses increased sharply, tripling during the last century of Ming rule.²⁴² Conversion of these types of corvée into payments in silver was often not realistic because hired replacements were hard to find.²⁴³ It required the latest of the Ming reforms of the seventeenth century to address these remaining problems, which were aggravated by increasing numbers of exempted or absentee landowners.

The above outline shows that the Ming system had run into problems in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but acceptable solutions to these problems were found at local levels after the 1570s. The breakdown of the original Ming rural administrative and social institutions does not readily correspond to the military and political takeover of the Ming by the Ch'ing. The most one can say is that the spread of the late Ming reforms was facilitated by the political climate present during the forceful establishment of social and political control by the early rulers of the Ch'ing dynasty.

COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

The market structure

Several approaches are possible in the effort to describe China's commercialization and its market structure. Some scholars stress the large amounts of grain and cotton moving mainly on the great commercial rivers and canals of the country and delight in pointing out all kinds of specialized handicrafts or exotic fruits for which a village or a county was known. There are certainly enough such examples to dispel the notion, maintained by others, that China's rural farmers were in an autarkic stage or that China was composed of self-sufficient cells having no links with each other except for those created by an

241 In Chinese: *yün-bu* (grain transport households) or *chieh-bu* (grain delivery households), *pu-chieh* (cloth delivery households), and *k'u-tzu* (granary attendants) or *tou-chi* (granary weighers) respectively. "Post attendants" (*i-fu*), horse raising households (*yang-ma*, in the Northern Metropolitan Region mainly) and archers (*kung-ping*) also remained burdensome duties.

242 Chang Hsien-ch'ing, "Ming-tai kuan-shen yu-mien," during Liu Tsung-chou's life (1578-1645), expenses of a *li-chang* increased from 20-30 *taels* to 60-100. See *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period (1644-1912)*, ed. Arthur W. Hummel (Washington, D.C., 1943), pp. 532-33.

243 Iwami, "Min no Kasei zengo."

overly powerful central state, with no future of “modern” development. However, rather than present too glowing a picture of late imperial China’s economy, or, by comparing it unrealistically with twentieth-century Western standards, to see in it “no possibility of development,” it is better to say that it was impressive by contemporary standards even though it still by-passed large numbers of people.

The increase in the population, which was accompanied by a consequent diminution in the size of the average landholdings and the development of marginal lands previously unfit for food production, made it necessary for farmers to rely partly on cash crops to make a living. To some extent, some cultivation of these crops had always been necessary in order to pay the taxes and rents. At the lowest level, therefore, small cyclical markets continued to appear along with the increase in the population and in keeping with the economic conditions of the region. It is very difficult to call these markets “commercial,” however. Producers and consumers bartered their goods to alleviate their needs, and outside interference was mainly lacking. Official brokers (*ya-hang*) only appeared in larger markets when merchants from the outside started to buy or sell grain, textiles, or livestock in places where well-intended local members of the elite had neither successfully kept the state away by founding so-called “free markets” (*i-shih*), nor provided the necessary mediation and supervision. There was not much profit to be made in most of these local markets, because everyone knew the value of the labor involved in producing the products and expected “fairness” in their transactions. At this stage, utility value, not exchange value, was the target of these markets. Without doubt, most of the markets, which increased in number during the Ming, were of this kind.

The same things can be said of the markets that grew up at the borders between the mountainous regions and the lowlands as the mountainous regions developed. In Fukien and Chekiang, many markets of this kind developed between these less self-sufficient but complementary environments. These markets were often singled out by writers who made the point that one should not consider them to be markets where cash crops were handled.²⁴⁴

244 See, for example, Fujii Hiroshi, “Shin’an shōnin no kenkyū,” *Tōyō gakubō*, 36, No. 1 (June 1953) pp. 1–44; 36, No. 2 (September 1953), pp. 32–60; 36, No. 3 (December 1953), pp. 65–118; 36, No. 4 (March 1954), pp. 115–45. I follow here the basic reservations in Wu Ch’eng-ming, “Ming-tai kuo-nei shih-ch’ang ho shang-jen tzu-pen,” *Chung-kuo she-hui k’o-hsiieh-yüan ching-chi yen-chiu-so chi-k’ao* 5 (1983), pp. 1–32, for those markets and want to point to the fact that in many areas they were too few and exceptional to be viewed as signs of commercialization. They did, however, constitute the first layer of later development. For another opinion regarding commercialization in Ming and Ch’ing China, see Albert Feuerwerker, “‘Proto-industrialization’ and China’s ‘capitalist sprouts’: a comparative discussion.” In *Kim Chun-yōp kyosū hwagap kinyōm Chungguokhak nonch’ong*, ed.

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A second form of market exchange was the urban-rural type, which especially developed in places where landlords were coming in increasing numbers to dwell in towns and cities near their landholdings, as was the case in the Chiang-nan region (where many were officials) or in Fukien (where they more often tended to be merchants). Rents and taxes due them were transported along the canals and rivers, and surpluses from landlords and tenants alike were sold in the markets. Better infrastructure tended to increase the distances that the goods in these markets were transported in comparison to the distances the goods found in the self-sufficient local markets described above were transported. It is important to note, however, that even in the urban-rural markets, “profits” and professional merchants were not always directly involved, nor were taxes and rents always exchanged for outside commodities, even when, as in the case of China at this time, a total of thirty or forty million *tan* of rice may have been involved.²⁴⁵

A more important, so-called “national market,” had been evolving in China since Sung times and would develop rapidly after the Ming. This market involved not only the exchange of the surplus income of landlords, tenants and other producers (often for luxury products), as was the case in the urban-rural markets, but also the exchange of commodities that were produced directly for the market itself and that were exchanged for other such commodities or for money. Merchants appeared who made use of the direct producers’ inability to trade directly with consumers, and these merchants benefited from interregional (and, after 1550, international) rather than intra-regional price differences. Profits were now to be made, albeit in some

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Kim Chun-yōp *kyosu hwagap kinyōm Chunggukhak nonch'ong p'yōnch'an wiwōnhoe* (Seoul, 1983), pp. 395–414. Broadly defined, the term “commercialization of agriculture” includes any situation where part of a household’s harvest is traded in the market for other products, money, or some combination of the two. In China, this phenomenon was already widespread by the twelfth century. See Shiba Yoshinobu, *Sōdai shōgyōshi kenkyū*, Tōkyō: Kazama shobō, 1968; abstract trans. as *Commerce and Society in Sung China*, tr. Mark Elvin (Ann Arbor, 1970). In my view, however, such households by and large became involved in market transactions in order to acquire the money needed to pay taxes, to purchase products they could not produce themselves, and to dispose of harvest or rent surpluses. Under these conditions, a trend towards higher agricultural prices would decrease rather than increase the amount of agricultural produce traded, because the amount of money needed for taxes and so forth could be met by selling less. Therefore, with a few exceptions, the basic economic structure did not change as a result of this kind of commercial activity. In contrast, the word “commercialization” as used in this chapter refers to those cases, periods, and regions in which the economic structure *did* undergo fundamental changes, and in which production for the market was not a necessity reluctantly engaged in, but the primary determinant of a household’s activities. Under these conditions, a trend towards higher prices would induce more, not less production. I regard this second wave of “commercialization” as an important phenomenon that spread since mid-Ming times, although even by the twentieth century it had not yet engulfed all parts of China.

245 See Wu Ch'eng-ming, “Lun Ch'ing-tai ch'ien-ch'i wo-kuo kuo-nei shih-ch'an,” *Li-shih yen-chiu*, 1983, No. 1, pp. 96–106.

cases (for instance the tea and salt trade) somewhat artificially by using state monopolies. The merchants were in due course made to pay official taxes, and the geographic distribution of the tax bureaus (*ch'ao-kuan*) in the early fifteenth century reveals the main commercial arteries of the empire and underscores the fact that long-distance trade along the major rivers was the mainstay of the economic structure of the empire. One must note that the overarching importance of such long-distance trade to the Ming economy explicitly contravenes a “macro-regional” treatment of China’s historic economy. Although regional differences based on geographical, political, or historical realities were very important for socio-economic structures, most trade took place and most profits were made and could only be made inter-regionally. These economic exchanges dwarfed the exchanges that occurred within the regions, and often there were no exchanges within a region at all if the region was distant from a major river. The contention that every city within a macro-region had more trade with every other city within the macro-region than with any city outside the region²⁴⁶ cannot be substantiated historically; long-distance trade seems to have been the condition for, not the result of the emergence of more regional economies.

The trade along the Yangtze was the most important, with some tax bureaus existing in Szechwan, some existing in Hu-kuang (for the armies in Ching-chou), and most being in the Chiang-nan area where the market densities were high. In these areas, cash crops could be exchanged for handicrafts with the exchange being mediated by money.

The Grand Canal, in use from 1411 on, was another major artery along which not only the tribute grain (which was not, strictly speaking, commercial), but also additional grain and cotton cloth for the armies in the North was transported, with these items of military supply being exchanged for salt vouchers. Empty boats would try to take marketable products, mainly raw cotton, back with them on their return south. Items that fell more or less into the luxury category also were transported to the North after the transfer of the capital to Peking in the 1420s. Private merchants conducted much of that trade, or officials engaged in it in a private capacity. Cities like Te-chou and Lin-ch’ing (on the Canal in Shantung), or Kao-yu and Yang-chou (in the Southern Metropolitan Region) were far more important as commercial centers during Ming and Ch’ing times than they are in the present

246 See G. William Skinner, “Regional urbanization in nineteenth-century China.” In *The city in late imperial China*, ed. G. William Skinner (Stanford, 1977), pp. 211–36; and his “Cities and the hierarchy of local systems.” In the same work, pp. 281–301, Rowe’s study on Han-k’ou also shows that all early trade of any importance was along the rivers flowing to the Yangtze: Han-k’ou deriving its improving status during the late Ming period from the Yangtze trade, not from trade with its hinterland. See William T. Rowe, *Hankow: commerce and society in a Chinese city, 1796–1889* (Stanford, 1984).

century. Granaries collecting the tribute grain destined for the capital were located in Te-chou, Lin-ch'ing, as well as in Huai-an and Hsü-chou, both in Kiangsu.

Another commercial artery was the sea, which linked Chinese ports with overseas trading ports and which was developed for the most part despite the Ming laws against overseas private trade. Silk, ceramics, cotton, lacquer, and sugar were exported, first to the Ryūkyūs, to Japan, and to Southeast Asia, and later (through Manila, Macao, and other places) to the West. Since the substantial portion of this trade that did not fall under tribute relationships was illegal during the Ming and goes largely unrecorded; it is difficult to compare the income from this trade with the income from the officially sanctioned trade in Sung times. Trade also occurred along the whole coast of China, but it was mainly concentrated along the southern coast between the Yangtze and the Pearl River deltas.

Overland trade lacked the ease of transport and economy of water-borne trade, yet there was a fifth commercial belt, located in the North, where the armies defending against the nomads of Inner Asia were stationed. The demand there was high owing to the large number of military personnel, the transfer of monies as salaries by the government, and the local insufficiency of supplies. These factors made it possible to earn high profits. Consequently, the government did not hesitate to establish tax bureaus in the region.²⁴⁷

As far as the major products exchanged nationally are concerned, the trade in foodstuffs, mainly rice, was most important, even though a large portion went into the tax grain payments that provided for the government, or into rents that ultimately contributed to the support of cities and towns. During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, southeastern China became a region that suffered a chronic deficit of food grain and was forced to import cereals from Chiang-nan, Kwangtung, or Kwangsi, depending on availability and price. Fukien especially was affected, since local food supplies had always been scarce, and its reliance on other cash crops was perhaps higher therefore than that of any other region. Increasingly from 1500 onward, Chiang-nan itself imported much rice from the upper reaches of the Yangtze (Hu-kuang, Kiangsi, and Anhwei), even though locally rice productivity was high and other cash crops were not always planted owing to the high demand for rice. The demands of Chiang-nan were especially dominant because of several factors: population density was very high; a large proportion

²⁴⁷ We shall follow Wu Ch'eng-ming, who has attempted to tabulate macro-economically the structure of commerce. Some of his articles are collected in Wu Ch'eng-ming, *Chung-kuo ts'u-pen-chu-i yü kuo-nei shih-ch'ang* (Pei-ching, 1985).

of the population of its cities, as hubs of transport at the end of several major arteries, was nonagricultural; and especially high tax levies were laid on its own rice, which was much in demand by the government because of its superior quality. A third area that was deficient in foodstuffs was the region around Hui-chou prefecture in southern Anhwei: small in area, it was nevertheless important because of a high concentration of demand that was related in various ways to the fact that the rich merchants involved in the salt trade originated and were still considered official residents there.

Transport to the North had deteriorated after changes that allowed silver rather than grain to be directly exchanged for salt vouchers were made in the salt distribution system in the middle of the fifteenth century.²⁴⁸ The government, or the soldiers themselves, were to use that silver to buy their grain locally. However, these changes in the salt distribution system resulted in a steady decline in local grain production, which had hitherto been underwritten by merchants who needed a steady supply of grain, not silver, to obtain vouchers for the salt they distributed. The northern defense zone was thus turned into a grain deficient region, one that, unlike the South, had no local products to exchange for rice or other grain that were brought from afar. Therefore, economic conditions throughout the region deteriorated after 1500.

Wu Ch'eng-ming estimates that during the sixteenth century an annual total of about ten million *tan* of rice must have entered the long-distance trade. That figure excludes taxes and rent received in kind that was consumed. Worth roughly 8.5 million *taels*, most of these cereal grains must have been sold by landlords as surplus rent income.

If we exclude salt on the grounds that as a product of a government monopoly it did not strictly follow economic rules, cotton was the second most important item of trade. Raw cotton was produced mainly in the North, first in Honan and Shantung and only later in Kiangsi and Hu-kuang.²⁴⁹ From there, it was transported to Chiang-nan for cloth production²⁵⁰ (and increasingly to Fukien), although some cotton was produced locally as well.

Sung-chiang prefecture (south of modern Shanghai) produced the greatest amount of cotton cloth. It exported "standard cloth" (*piao-pu*) to Shansi and Shensi, "midloom cloth" (*chung-chi*) to Hu-kuang, Kiangsi, and Kwangsi, and "small cloth" (*hsiao-pu*) to Kiangsi. Other cities had more localized markets: Chia-ting sold to Hang-chou, Ch'ang-shu to Shantung, and so forth.

²⁴⁸ See, for example, Terada, *Sansei shōnin no kenkyū*.

²⁴⁹ Especially in Tung-ch'ang, Yen-chou prefectures in Shantung, especially Yün-ch'eng county in the latter.

²⁵⁰ For example, T'ai-ts'ang county and the nearby town of Hsin-ching.

Since cotton could be used for warm padded clothing, its first markets were in the North because of its need for the same. This cotton trade included the cloth-for-horses trade on the Inner Asian borders. At the end of the Ming, some areas that formerly produced only raw cotton (for example, Hupei and Shantung) started to produce their own textiles instead of importing them, and Sung-chiang lost some of its market share in the North and West. Wu estimates that the total cloth production, including the locally consumed production, was about 20 million bolts, worth 3.3 million *taels*.

A third major commodity was silk. Raw silk was produced in the countryside, while most processing (reeling, spooling, sizing, weaving, calendering and dyeing or printing) was done in the towns and cities. Two major areas produced the silk, one around Hu-chou in northern Chekiang, the silk of which was processed mainly in Hang-chou, Hu-chou, and Su-chou, and one in Pao-ning prefecture (present-day Lang-chung) in Szechwan, the silk of which was processed mainly at Lu-an in Shansi, an historical center for silk processing technology that remained important even after local raw silk production had ceased. In later Ming times, trade with foreign countries was to give silk-weaving in Fukien, and eventually, in Kwangtung, a boost over the other production regions. Wu estimates total annual production at 300,000 bolts worth 0.3 million *taels*, indicating that even silk products constituted only a small part of the overall Ming trade when compared with grain, cotton textiles, and salt.²⁵¹

The Ming market structure also involved other products. Sugar was transported from Chang-chou and Ch'üan-chou in Fukien to Chiang-nan, Chekiang, and abroad. Paper was transported from Yen-shan in Kiangsi to Honan and Anhwei. Ceramics were transported everywhere from Ching-techen in Kiangsi. Iron in raw form was transported from Kwangtung to Kiangsi, from Szechwan to Wu-hsi in Kiangsu, and from Fukien to Su-chou, while for iron products, Fo-shan (Fat-shan) in Kwangtung was the major export center. The beginning of a market in fertilizers was not so important yet, but was theoretically of major significance: soy-bean cakes were the principal form of this commodity, and it constituted the first item in a "capital" market, for it was not a product for consumption, but was used to increase the production of other commodities.²⁵²

²⁵¹ The numbers for the later Ming period seem very low in comparison with Wu's estimates for the early to mid-Ch'ing period. In the latter case, his figures are 95 million *taels* for cotton cloth, 13 million *taels* for raw cotton, and 12 million *taels* for silk and silk products. This has the Ch'ing market expanding from 45 million *taels* to 388 million *taels*. This can be explained in part by the increased silver supply, but Wu might well have seriously underestimated the Ming market economy. Notice, however, that the ratio of cotton cloth to silk decreased slightly from 11:1 to 7.9:1.

²⁵² See Huang P'ei-chin, "Kuan-yü Ming-tai kuo-nei shih-ch'ang wen-t'i ti k'ao-ch'a." In *Ming-Ch'ing*
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Growth in the prices of these industrial products lagged behind the growth in the price of rice, reflecting both larger increases in the productivity of the handicraft sector and growth in the population. In China, one bolt of cotton cloth could buy two *tan* of rice around 1440, 1.27 *tan* around 1470, and only 0.82 *tan* around 1540. China was heading for a time when the increases in its production of cotton cloth and of other handicrafts would fail to compensate for higher food prices; this seems to have happened early in the seventeenth century. For a map showing the emerging national market, see Map 9.1; Map 9.2 shows the most important economic centers during the Ming.

Regional variations

Regionally, the following situations obtained.²⁵³ In the North, Shansi, Shensi, and Kansu needed to import grain, but had nothing to sell; even such necessities as clothing and salt had to be paid for in grain, which in that region was in short supply. Lu-an's silk industry in Shansi, based on imports of raw silk from Szechwan and to a lesser degree from Hu-kuang, was an exception; but even so, this industry seems to have languished until the Wan-li period.²⁵⁴ Only during the late Ming and early Ch'ing did cotton cloth begin to be produced in the North in such places as Yü-tz'u in Shansi. One of the few export products was wool: the Kuan-chung region of southeastern Shensi was the major center in the country for woollens. Some luxuries were available in the markets of the large northern garrison border cities such as Ta-t'ung and Hsüan-fu, not to mention Peking; but these all came from Chiang-nan by way of the Grand Canal. Government policy caused some investments to be made in the region when horse-tea trading markets were opened along the northern border in 1575: in Hsüan-fu 120,000 *taels* was invested, in Ta-t'ung 70,000, and in Shui-ch'üan (west of Ta-t'ung) 40,000. Yet these investments do not appear to have had much effect on the straitened regional economy.²⁵⁵

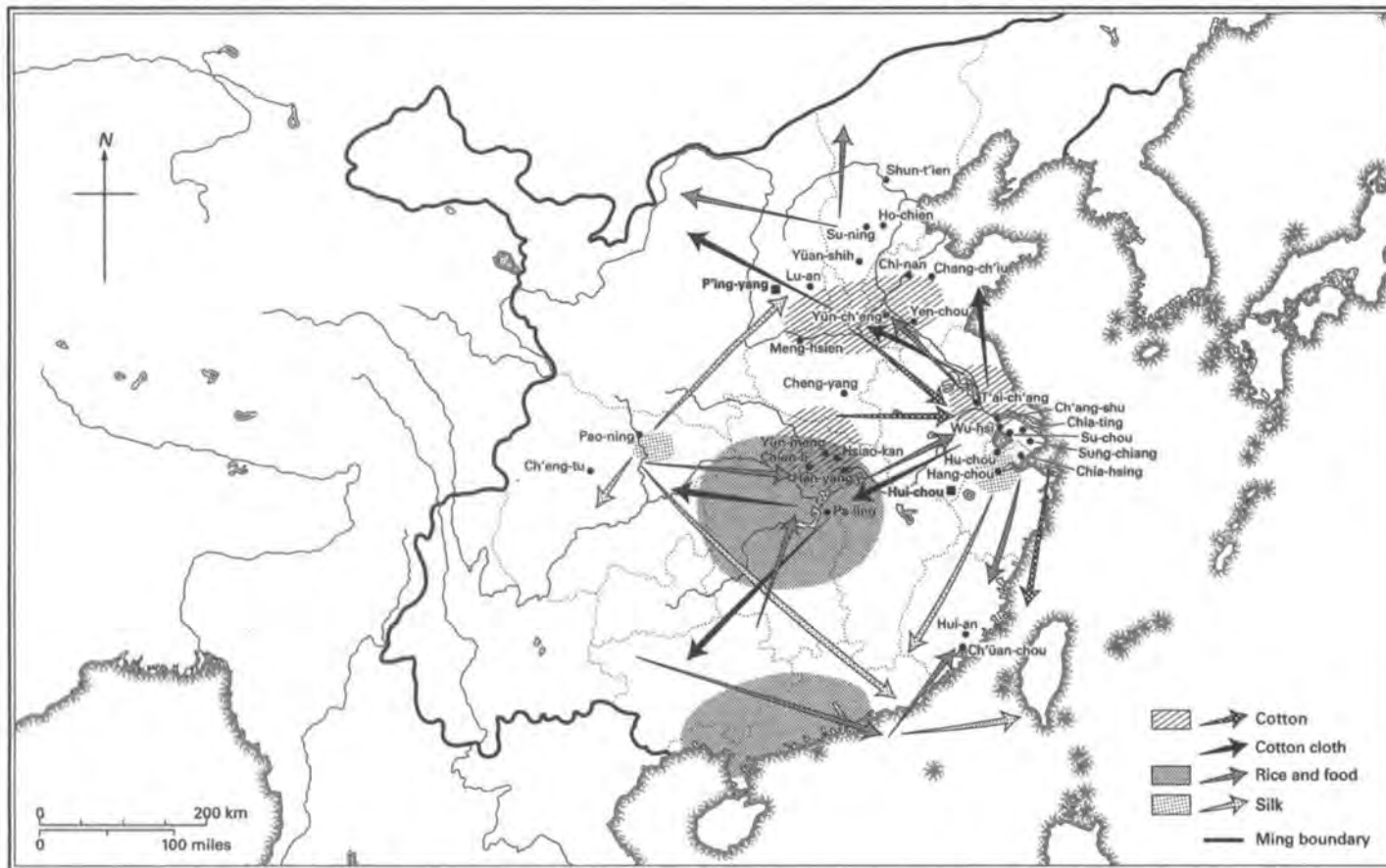
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she-hui ching-chi hsing-t'ai ti yen-chiu, Chung-kuo jen-min ta-hsüeh Chung-kuo li-shih chiao-yen-shih hui-chi chih, ed. Chung-kuo jen-min ta-hsüeh Chung-kuo li-shih chiao-yen-shih (Shang-hai, 1957), pp. 198–262.

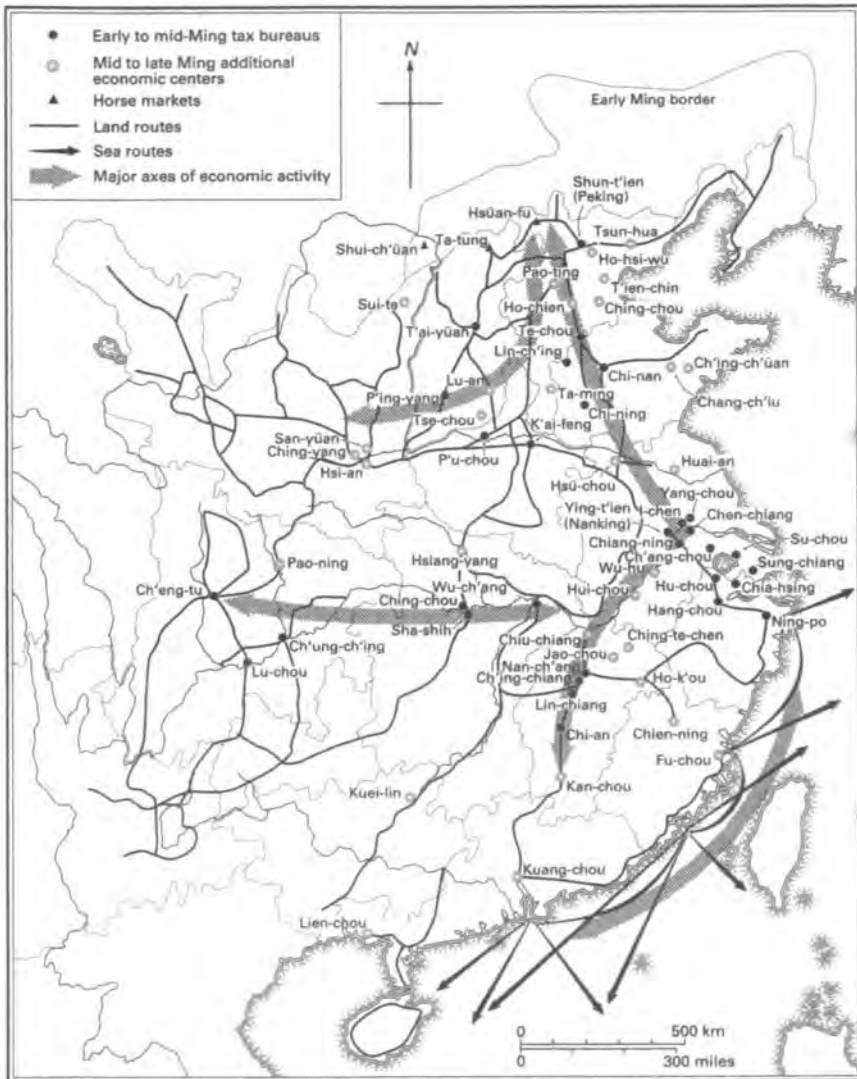
253 See also Fujii, "Shin'an shōnin no kenkyū," part 1.

254 Another minor exception was Ch'in-yüan in Shansi, which traded its iron for salt and cotton cloth.

255 See Hou Jen-chih, "Ming-tai Hsüan Ta Shan-hsi san-ch'en ma-shih k'ao," *Yen-ching hsüeh-pao*, 23 (1938), pp. 183–237, trans. as. "Frontier horse markets in the Ming dynasty." In *Chinese social history in translations of selected studies*, American Council of Learned Societies – Studies in Chinese and Related Civilizations, No. 7, eds. and trans. E-tu Zen (Jen I-tu) Sun and John deFrancis (1957), pp. 309–32.



Map 9.1. National market in the late Ming



Map 9.2. Ming economic centers and roads

The situation was somewhat similar in Honan, although it could export raw cotton. By doing so, however, it came under the influence of outside merchants, mostly from Shansi.²⁵⁶

The situation was quite different along the Grand Canal in Shantung, where transport facilities had created large cities with shops and storage establishments, of which Lin-ch'ing was the greatest. Lesser products, such as paper from Fukien, ginseng and sables from Manchuria, and the like, also were exchanged here. Except for raw cotton, trade in local products was on a much smaller scale.

During the Ming, Kiangsu was the center of cotton cloth production, even though production slackened somewhat with the beginnings of local production elsewhere, in Shantung, or at Hsien-ning and Pa-ling in Hu-kuang. Kiangsu gained more international export facilities, however, and it is not entirely clear which development won out: the loss to competing centers or the gains from exports. Together with cloth production, the manufacture of dyestuffs became important, although they were produced at some slight distance from the core area for textile production. Ju-kao, Hsing-hua and Huai-an in northern Kiangsu, Chia-ting and Ching-chiang in southern Kiangsu, and above all, Wu-hu in Anhwei, became important processing centers. Oil and bean cakes as well as wheat became commercial commodities at Yang-chou and in Huai-an county, both north of the river. Chekiang, on the other hand, was the center for silk production. Processed mostly at Hang-chou, its raw material came from around Hu-chou, which also shipped to Fukien and Kwangtung.

Anhwei had little to sell. As noted, Wu-hu was the dye center during the Ming, although its major production shifted to iron in the Ch'ing. From north of the Yangtze, wheat and beans were traded to the core of the Chiang-nan area.

Kiangsi had to import its textiles: silk from Chekiang, cotton cloth from Chiang-nan and, later, also from Hu-kuang. It did have a surplus in rice production in the South, and around Kan-chou indigo production also became important. Kiangsi acquired its fame from its ceramic production in and around the large city of Ching-te-chen, and its production spread into the Fu-liang and Jao-chou areas.

Fukien depended primarily on noncereal production. As early as 1500, sugarcane was a major product of Hsing-hua prefecture, as were ceramics. Paper was produced at Yen-p'ing and Chien-ning, where large iron and silver

²⁵⁶ See Fujii, "Shin'an shōnin no kenkyū," part 3, pp. 97–98.

mines were also concentrated. Silk was produced in Chang-chou and tea in Chin-chiang, the seat of Ch'üan-chou prefecture. Around 1500, Fu-chou witnessed major technological improvements in silk weaving, and together with its better placement for overseas trade, this made its produce competitive with the older Lu-an and Su-chou production centers. Tobacco also began to be imported and grown in the late Ming, while cotton cloth production began in Hui-an.²⁵⁷ It should be noted that in these regions where landowner absenteeism was greater than elsewhere, most marketing was done by the tenants themselves, and this further weakened the relative position of the landlords.²⁵⁸

In Kwangtung and Kwangsi, although major advances in production at local levels were seen, involvement in the national market came somewhat later. Perhaps the same can be said for Szechwan.

It is certain that Hu-kuang developed markedly during the Ming, first trading mainly rice for salt. Tea, oil, paper, and ceramics from Li-ling county on the Kiangsi border were traded in the South. As mentioned above, cotton cloth production became increasingly important in Hsien-ning (south of Wu-ch'ang) and Pa-ling (modern Yüeh-chou) counties. It has been surmised that most of Hu-kuang's rice trade was carried on by landlords, in a pattern that permits comparison with the refeudalization of Eastern Europe.²⁵⁹ There is some point to this comparison: the economic reliance of Hu-kuang on grain export to other provinces made exploitation of this trade by landlords both necessary and profitable. How tenant-landlord relationships changed according to whether an area exported grain (that is, had access to transport waterways), or not, has been shown by Shigeta Atsushi.²⁶⁰

Many of the factors relevant to Wu Ch'eng-ming's conclusions that were drawn from his investigations of the early Ch'ing were already present in the late Ming. According to Wu, the national market (leaving aside the other kinds of markets previously described) was comprised in value of 42 percent foodstuffs, which was equivalent to 11 percent of total food production;²⁶¹ of 24 percent cotton cloth (53 percent of total production); 15 percent salt, 8 percent tea, and of 4 percent silk products (92 percent

257 Huang Pei-chin, "Ming-tai kuo-nei shih-ch'ang."

258 See also Fujii, "Shin'an shōnin no kenkyū," part 3.

259 This point has been established by several Japanese scholars, including Fujii, "Shin'an shōnin no kenkyū."

260 Shigeta Atsushi, "Shinsho ni okeru Konan beishijō no ichi kōsatsu," *Tōyō bunka kenkyū*, 10 (Nov. 1956), pp. 427–98; rpt. in his *Shindai shakai keizaishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1975), pp. 1–66.

261 This is somewhat higher than Dwight Perkins' estimate of 7 to 8 percent for total agricultural production; see Perkins, *Agricultural development in China*.

of the total product marketed); while raw cotton and silk each accounted for 3 percent. The basic pattern of the exchange of food for cotton cloth and salt remained.²⁶²

The commercialized production of cotton and silk greatly increased the number of market towns that specialized in one product or the other. Many more of these market towns became places for the local redistribution of goods than had earlier been the case. The binomes *shih-chen* and *chen-shih*, or the words *shih* (market) and *chen* (town without administrative status) used separately, had become names for commercial places rather than for places where an office of the police or the military (*hsün-chien ssu*) had been established to control and tax trade.²⁶³

It would be a mistake to conclude that very sizeable rural towns of more than 1,000 households could appear only after larger-scale commercialization had begun. Such places in Chiang-nan as P'ing-wang, T'ung-li, Chu-ching (or, modern Chin-shan), and Wang-chiang-ching were already quite large when they became important as cotton or silk trading centers. In late Ming times, the largest towns in a county were not necessarily commercially important, except for the influence they exerted through food imports for their inhabitants.²⁶⁴ Urbanization, commercialization, and the growth of market towns are interrelated but separate phenomena.

In the early Ming, the North witnessed a general increase of markets (or market days per month) in the county seat cities themselves, a trend that continued during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The fact that markets increased suggests that the presence of sizeable markets, even within the administrative cities, should not to be taken for granted early in the Ming. After 1500, with the increase in population, rural markets were gradually set up by officials or local elite leaders. Markets with a governmental

262 The rice trade would grow enormously, reaching thirty million *tan*, but there still remained the difficulty that the North produced little to serve as an exchange value for it. As salt was inelastic in demand, cotton cloth seems to have been the only commodity that might have become the motor of total commercialization; however, the increasing demand for rice, a result of population pressure, always constituted a brake on development of its full potential. The map shows information for the late-Ming early-Ch'ing period as given by Liu Yung-ch'eng, "Lun Chung-kuo tzu-pen chu-i meng-ya ti li-shih ch'ien-t'i," *Chung-kuo-shih yen-chiu*, 2 (1979), (July), pp. 32-46.

263 Most often the names are not interchangeable locally, indicating some kind of hierarchy in which the *chen* is usually larger; but opposite usages also are known. See Liu Shih-chi, "Ming Ch'ing shih-tai Chiang-nan shih-chen chih shu-liang fen-hsi," *Ssu yü yen*, 16, No. 2 (July 1987), pp. 128-49. See also Liu Shih-chi, *Ming-Ch'ing shih-tai Chiang-nan shih-chen yen-chiu* (Pei-ching, 1987).

264 In Chia-ting county of southeastern Kiangsu, Nan-hsiang, Lou-t'ang, and Lo-tien each had more than 1500 households, but only the first is really known as a commercial center and a declining one at that; broker guilds are said to have stifled its growth. See Jerry Dennerline, *The Chia-ting loyalists: Confucian leadership and social change in seventeenth-century China*, Yale Historical Publications, Miscellany, 126 (New Haven, 1981), p. 75, n. 3.

presence (*ya-hang* [brokers] or *hsün-lan* [superintendents]) seem to have been about equal in number to those places that lacked a governmental presence. Income derived from managing these markets was, however, negligible. During the rebellions and the military actions at the end of the Ming, many marketplaces were destroyed, and it took a surprisingly long time to re-establish all of them.²⁶⁵ There was little increase in the number of market sites in North China from the end of the Wan-li reign (early seventeenth century) to the beginning of the Ch'ien-lung period (early to mid-eighteenth century).²⁶⁶

In the Chiang-nan region and the Southeast, conditions were different. In Su-chou, the number of markets rose from thirty in about 1400 to forty-five around 1520; in Hang-chou, the number rose from twenty-one in about 1500 to forty-four around 1600; in Chia-ting from six in about 1520 to seventeen around 1600; and in Chia-hsing from seven in about 1530 to twenty-eight around 1600. This growth process does not appear to have ceased during the Ming-Ch'ing transition. Markets in Sung-chiang rose from forty-four in about 1520 to seventy-nine around 1700; and in Ch'ang-chou prefecture from twenty-two in about 1500 to sixty-six around 1700. In general, Liu Shih-chi estimates the increase from 1500 to 1650 to have been two and one-half times.²⁶⁷

Cities with highly specialized products were often the pride of Ming writers, such as Sheng-tse and Chen-tse, Wang-ching-chiang and P'u-yüan, Shuang-lin and Ling-hu as the main silk centers, or Feng-ching and Wei-t'ang (seat of Chia-shan county), Chu-ching and An-t'ing as the main cotton centers. (See Map 9.3, for the economic centers in the Yangtze delta.) Such towns as these acquired more urban characteristics as time went on.²⁶⁸ It is nonetheless hard to discern an overall shift to increasing urbanization that supposedly resulted in a typical bourgeois city population pushing for reforms. In fact, a ruralization of some industry could not be forestalled by growth of the cities. In some cases, large-scale urban manufacturing appears

265 Yamane Yukio, "Min-Shin sho no Kahoku no shishū to shinshi, gōmin," in Min-Shin shi ronsō kankōkai, ed., *Nakayama Hachirō kyōju shōju kinen Min Shinsbi ronsō* (Tokyo, 1977), pp. 303–32.

266 Yamane Yukio, "Min-Shin jidai Kahoku ni okeru teiki-ichi," *Tōkyō joshi daigaku shiron*, 8 (November 1960), pp. 493–504, esp. the tables on p. 495. For the largest compilation of data regarding the increase in periodical markets during Ming and Ch'ing times and a geographer's opinion thereof, see Ishihara Hiroshi, *Teiki-ichi no kenkyū – kinō to kōzō* (Nagoya, 1987).

267 Judging from his graph; Liu Shih-chi, "Chiang-nan shih-chen." These figures must be used with caution; the sources from which the numbers are derived are not wholly comparable.

268 In places such as Tzu-yang (seat of Yen-chou prefecture), Tsou-hsien, or Yang-ku in Shantung the residents would still return to their rural homes in the autumn to assist with the harvest, but that ceased to be true of the new type of city. See, among others, Huang P'ei-chin, "Ming-tai kuo-nei shih-ch'ang" for more detailed investigations. For other cities, see also, for example, for P'u-yüan, Ch'en Hsüeh-wen, "Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch'i Chiang-nan ti i ko chuan-yeh shih-chen – P'u-yüan

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to have diminished, and the government itself closed down some of its own textile manufacturing establishments.²⁶⁹

Cities both large and small could have astonishing numbers of specialized artisan “guilds.” Chiang-ning county (with its seat in Nanking) had 104 in about 1500, and the new commercial city of Sha-shih on the Yangtze near the old administrative center of Chiang-ling in Hu-kuang had ninety-nine at the end of the Ming.²⁷⁰ This fact points to an excessive division of labor rather than a “progressive” social division of labor and might have been an obstacle for further economic growth, for extreme specialization by artisans normally inhibits commercialization despite the received wisdom among Mainland Chinese historians.²⁷¹

As far as sizes and ranks of cities is concerned, we know little. An interesting passage in the She-hsien gazetteer (in Hui-chou prefecture, southern Anhwei), classifies Nanking (Ying-t’ien), Hang-chou, Fu-chou, Peking (Shun-t’ien), Nan-ch’ang (Kiangsi), and Kuang-chou (Canton) as the empire’s cities of the first rank. Su-chou, Sung-chiang, Huai-an, Yang-chou, Lin-ch’ing, Chi-ning, I-chen (modern I-cheng, north of the Yangtze river in Kiangsu), Wu-hu, Kua-chou (directly opposite Chen-chiang), and Ching-te-chen are listed there as cities of the second rank.²⁷² Hu-chou and Han-k’ou are missing, but certainly developed later in the dynasty. The list is not without its surprises; for example, the inclusion of Kua-chou, and the placement of Nan-ch’ang in the first rank and of Su-chou in the second. Yet the list seems to fit well with other information and does not overstate a city’s com-

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chen ti ching-chi chieh-kou chih t’an-so,” *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih yen-chiu*, 1 (1985), pp. 54–61; and for Wu-ch’ing (present-day Wu-chen), Hayashi Kazuo, “Chūgoku kinsei ni okeru chihō toshi no hattatsu – Taiko heigen Usei-chin no baai.” In *Chūgoku kinsei no toshi to bunka*, ed. Umehara Kaoru (Kyōto, 1984), pp. 419–54, and Ch’en Hsüeh-wen, “Ming-Ch’ing shih-ch’i Chiang-nan chū chen Wu-ch’ing-chen ti ching-chi chieh-kou,” *Chung-kuo ching-chi-shih yen-chiu*, 2 (1988), pp. 29–38. The latter author has recently devoted a whole series of articles to the smaller, new towns in the Chiang-nan area. See also Fan Shu-chih, *Ming-Ch’ing Chiang-nan shih-chen t’an-wei* (Shang-hai, 1990).

269 See, for example, Chao, *Man and land in Chinese history*; Tanaka Masatoshi, “Chūgoku rekishigakkai ni okeru ‘shihonshugi no hōga’ kenkyū;” Saeki Yūichi, “Nihon no Min-Shin jidai kenkyū ni okeru shōhin seisan hyōka o megutte – sono gakusetsushiteki tenbō.” In *Chūgokushi no jidai kubun*, ed. Suzuki Shun and Nishijima Sadao (Tokyo, 1957), pp. 253–321; and Saeki Yūichi, “Shukōgyō no hattatsu.” In *Yuragu Chūka teikoku*, Sekai no rekishi, 11, ed. Chikuma shobō henshūbu (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 213–32.

270 Huang P’ei-chin, “Ming-tai kuo-nei shih-ch’ang.”

271 For this argument, see Peter Kriedte, *Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung* (1977), trans. as “The origins, the agrarian context, and the conditions in the world market,” trans. Beate Schempp, in *Industrialization before industrialization – rural industry in the genesis of capitalism*, Studies in Modern Capitalism/Études sur le capitalisme moderne; Past and Present Publications, ed. Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm (Cambridge and Paris, 1981).

272 Cited, among others, by Fujii, “Shin’an shōnin no kenkyū,” part 1.

mercial importance. Near such urbanized areas some farmers specialized in growing vegetables, fruits, and flowers for sale in the city.

The major commodities: cotton and silk

In light of its commercial importance, it might be useful to examine the state of cotton and silk production in the Ming more closely. Cotton production was introduced to China during the Sung dynasty. With the improvement of ginning and spinning technology, it spread during the Yüan period from Kwangtung and Fukien and reached the lower Yangtze region; it also entered North China from Central Asia. Woven cotton was used for both ordinary and luxury clothing, and by 1500 it had largely superseded the earlier use of ramie and linen. Cotton grew especially well in alkaline soils and on the sand flats of the coastal regions. It is said that 50 percent of Shanghai county and 70 percent of adjacent Chia-ting and T'ai-ts'ang counties was planted with cotton.²⁷³

It was no accident that Sung-chiang became the center of cotton production. It was strategically located on the borderline between the spinning and weaving area in the South and the cotton growing areas to the North. In particular, cotton cultivation spread throughout the northeast portion of the Chiang-nan plain (largely north of the Yangtze), owing to good water transport and the local knowledge about weaving taken over from the silk industry. In those places, it replaced rice, which, because of soil conditions, had not thrived there.²⁷⁴ Cotton cloth was accepted in payment of taxes in these areas from 1433 onward, spurred by the government's enormous need for cotton garments for the garrison armies in the North. Yen Chung-p'ing has estimated that need to have been 15 million bolts annually.²⁷⁵ In fertile areas, cotton did not compete successfully with rice at that time.²⁷⁶ In fact, much of its success was due to the social and even more to the geographical

273 According to Craig Dietrich, "Cotton culture and manufactures in early Ch'ing China." In *Economic organization in Chinese society*, ed. W. E. Willmott (Stanford, 1972), pp. 109-35, three-fifths to four-fifths of all counties in the country produced at least some cotton during the early Ch'ing.

274 Terada Takanobu, "Mindai Soshū heiya no nōka keizai ni tsuite," *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 16, No. 1 (June 1957), pp. 1-25.

275 Yen Chung-p'ing, "Ming-Ch'ing liang-tai ti-fang-kuan ch'ang-tao fang-chih-yeh shih-li," *T'ang-fang-tsa-chib*, 42, No. 8 (15 April 1946), pp. 20-25, cited in Mi Chu Wiens, "Cotton textile production and rural social transformation in early modern China," *Hsiang-kan Chung-wen ta-shieh Chung-kuo wen-hua yen-chiu-so hsueh-pao*, 7/2 (Dec. 1974), pp. 515-34.

276 According to the calculations of Nishijima Sadao, "Chūgoku shoki mengyō no keisei to sono kōzō," *Tōgaku (Orientalica)* 2, (1949), rpt. in his *Chūgoku keizaishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1965), pp. 805-72, trans. as "The formation of the early Chinese cotton industry." In *State and society in China - Japanese perspectives on Ming-Qing social and economic history*, eds. and trans. Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 17-78.

niches it found. For the most part, women wove the cotton with privately owned looms, although in cities the production of cotton cloth gradually became a male occupation as well. Cotton could be cultivated in combination with barley and beans; and as a secondary crop, it was not always subject to taxation.

In regions other than Sung-chiang, the shift to cotton production came quite late: as late as 1486, officials in Chekiang tried to encourage it by importing weavers from Sung-chiang, and Lü K'un did the same in Shansi at the end of the sixteenth century.²⁷⁷ In some areas in Honan and Shantung especially, production spread in the sixteenth century to the extent that cotton production began to replace grain production.

Silk production was more profitable, but also riskier than cotton production. There are clear indications of how it spread. From its center in Su-chou, in about 1420 silk production spread to the adjacent county city of Wu-chiang to the South. Later in the fifteenth century, it spread to Chen-tse and nearby places, which became burgeoning new silk towns that provided processing and marketing facilities for a zone that comprised forty to fifty communities. Silk processing appears to have become a primary and specialized business for male heads of households earlier than cotton production did, and it promised rich profits. Silkworm raising, mulberry growing, and silk weaving were by and large separate operations as a result of the continued use of outmoded technology in certain stages of the production process. Silk clearly was produced for the market in such areas of heavy specialization as Hu-chou, Chia-hsing and Hang-chou. The producers did not wear it, and it seems to have been sold mainly in a market controlled by the buying merchants, not the selling producers.²⁷⁸ Because of the increases in the specialization and division of labor in the private sector, the twenty-odd official silk factories of the early Ming decreased to three: in Nanking, Su-chou, and Hang-chou respectively.²⁷⁹ After 1485, the government relied on the marketplace for the remainder of its needs. The silk workers, being urban laborers, were a major component of the riots against abusive eunuch supervisors in the period from 1590 to 1630.²⁸⁰

277 Mi Chu Wiens, "Cotton textile production."

278 See Terada, "Mindai Soshū heiya no nōka." One economic depression in the silk center of Hu-chou during Chia-ching times (1522–66) is said to have resulted in an inability to buy this needed raw cotton.

279 For the silk industry in Su-chou under control of the government, see Paolo Santangelo, *Le manifatture tessili imperiali durante le dinastie Ming e Qing con particolare attenzione a quelle di Suzhou* (Napoli, 1984).

280 Silk production in Lu-an might have depended more on official support, and it declined when the government began to rely upon the private Chiang-nan market. But see also Tanaka, "Kōnan nōson shukōgyō."

Merchant groups

An important element in the extension of commerce during the Ming was the impetus provided by the salt distribution system. In order to ensure that adequate supplies of grain reached the armies on the borders, mainly in the North, but also in Szechwan, the government instituted the so-called *k'ai-chung-fa* (salt barter system) in Yunnan beginning in 1389, and in Kweichow beginning in 1419. Under this system, in exchange for deliveries of grain and animal fodder to those border regions, the government issued salt vouchers that could be exchanged at production points for salt that the merchants could then sell under monopoly conditions in designated distribution areas. This assured merchants a larger profit than would have been possible under a free market distribution system. In theory, the government curtailed all official production to such a degree that the demand for salt always exceeded the supply.²⁸¹

The best salt and the largest amount of it was produced in the Liang-huai salt fields on the coast of northern Kiangsu. Only one main trip annually could be made from there to the delivery points and back. This restriction squeezed all but large, well-capitalized merchants out of the business and also favored those merchants who were based near the northern frontier zone, because they needed to spend less on grain transport. Thus, the merchants of Shansi and Shensi gained a great advantage and exploited it fully. Based in various places such as San-yüan, Ching-yang, and Sui-te in Shensi, and P'ing-yang (with its seat at Lin-fen), Tse-chou and Lu-an prefectures in Shansi, they were familiar with the local environmental conditions that allowed grain to be stored underground in loess caves sheltered from Mongol attacks.²⁸² They also encouraged local grain production by setting up so-called merchant colonies – agricultural estates under merchant control. They also dealt, both legally and illegally, in the horse-tea trade at the borders, and transported silk and cotton between the northern bases and the Chiang-nan area.²⁸³

Prices in grain for salt vouchers were regularly increased by the government, and gradually the ever-increasing need for grain caused too many salt vouchers to be handed out, reducing merchants' enthusiasm for them as the exchange became less profitable. Other problems merchants faced included an excessive waste of grain during transport and a slow turnover compared with competing opportunities in the silk and cotton markets. To entice

281 Therefore, illegal salt smuggling remained a chronic problem.

282 Fujii, "Shin'an shōnin no kenkyū," parts 2 and 3.

283 For Shan-hsi merchants (really Shan-hsi and Shaan-hsi), see especially Terada, *Sansei shōnin no kenkyū*.

more merchants to participate in the salt trade in 1492 the government, urged by Yeh Ch'i, Minister of Revenue from 1491 to 1496, decided to legalize the practice of paying silver for salt vouchers instead of grain, albeit at higher rates for the salt than had applied previously. Although this practice was financially profitable for the government since it increased revenues, it must have made the actual supply of grain for the northern garrisons more precarious. The problem of supplying grain to these garrisons was worse than would have otherwise been the case, because the military grain colonies had been deteriorating since the middle of the fifteenth century. But the new system was more convenient for the merchants: it relieved them of the obligation to supply grain and fodder to these distant garrisons.²⁸⁴

Another result of legalizing silver payments for salt was that merchants nearer to the Liang-Huai salt fields were now able to engage in the salt trade. Consequently, the merchants of Hsin-an (an alternate name for Hui-chou prefecture in southern Anhwei) gradually came to rival the Shansi and Shensi merchants from the North.²⁸⁵ They often moved into cities near the salt-producing areas, especially Yang-chou, which was near the Liang-Huai area and not too distant from the Liang-Che salt fields. The Shansi merchants also began to reside in these same cities.²⁸⁶ Based on the salt distribution trade, these merchants created large networks all over the country and dealt in many products: tea (also partly a monopoly product), cotton cloth, timber, silk. Rice and other cereals returned a lower profit per pound, and often were only taken along with other products.²⁸⁷ Merchants in the salt trade also increasingly involved themselves in moneylending, which must have been quite profitable owing to the widespread lack of capital.²⁸⁸

Commerce was a profitable undertaking: at the beginning of the seventeenth century the Tung-lin scholar Keng Chü (*chin-shih* of 1601)²⁸⁹ estimated that artisans made twice the profits of farmers, merchants thrice the profit, and salt merchants five times the profit. According to one figure from the

284 Wang Ch'ung-wu, "Ming-tai ti shang-t' un chih-tu," *Yü-kung*, 5, No. 12 (August 6, 1936), pp. 1-15, trans. as "The Ming system of merchant colonization." In *Chinese social history in translations of selected studies*, American Council of Learned Societies - Studies in Chinese and Related Civilizations, No. 7, eds. and trans. E-tu Zen (Jen I-tu), Sun and John deFrancis (1957), pp. 298-308.

285 Nine-tenths of the merchants in the important city of Lin-ch'ing on the Grand Canal in Shantung during the Wan-li period were said to have come from Hui-chou.

286 Terada, *Sansei shōnin no kenkyū*.

287 Wu Ch'eng-ming, "Ming-tai kuo-nei shih-ch'ang."

288 This is sometimes taken to be a sign of backwardness on the part of merchants and as evidence for their "premodern" behavior. I tend, however, to agree with Terada that the more interesting question is why was this apparently more profitable than direct commercial investment.

289 Keng Chü figures also prominently in Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*, esp. chs. 3 and 8, as the compiler of a famous work on water control regulations when he was magistrate of Ch'ang-shu in the early seventeenth century. See n. 473.

Wan-li period, there were seventeen persons in the entire empire worth as much as half-a-million taels. Three were merchants from Shansi, two were merchants from Hui-chou, and two individuals lived in the Kiangsu city of Wu-hsi; the others were princes or high officials.²⁹⁰ Entrance into the ranks of the richest salt merchants was severely restricted in 1617, when in order to solve the problem of an excess of outstanding salt vouchers, the government limited the number of merchants eligible to participate in the salt monopoly. Those merchants who retained their eligibility made some of the great fortunes of the Ch'ing period.

There were also other famous merchant groups, such as the Fukien, Kiangsi, and Su-chou groups. A subgroup of the last is also known as the Tung-t'ing group from the rich suburb near Su-chou on the banks of Lake T'ai-hu.²⁹¹ Such merchant groups were found all over China; in locales other than their native places, they were called guest or outside merchants (*k'o-shang*). These outside merchants must be distinguished from the much smaller-scale resident merchants (*tso-shang*) who provided them with storage facilities, shops, and some wholesale facilities.

THE AGRICULTURAL RESPONSE

Towards the intensification of agriculture

The response of agriculture to population growth stands behind social and economic changes. Until recent decades it has been, and in some circles, it continues to be the practice to invoke the so-called "dynastic cycle" (which ignores population growth) to explain socio-economic changes. This concept holds that at the beginning of a dynasty, official policy and the existence of widespread uncultivated, devastated areas allows for a resurgence of small-scale land-owning farmers; peace and increasing wealth then result in increased polarization in land ownership; the rich then legally or illegally evade taxation and corvée labor services, increasing the tax burden on small landowners, who finally revolt and cause the collapse of the dynasty. This model presupposes that the population is stable, that there is zero economic

290 Ch'ing period fortunes were much larger, with merchants, especially salt merchants, still dominant. See Wu Ch'eng-ming, "Ming-tai kuo-nei shih-ch'ang."

291 See Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch'ing shih-tai shang-jen chi shang-yeh tsu-pen* (Pei-ching, 1956); note that some popular works such as Jacques Gernet, *Le monde chinois* (Paris, 1972), trans. as *A history of Chinese civilization*, trans. J. R. Foster (Cambridge, 1982), on p. 429 of the English translation, and *The Times atlas of world history*, ed. Geoffrey Barraclough (London, 1978), p. 168, mistakenly identify this Tung-t'ing with Tung-t'ing lake in Ju-nan. See also Timothy Brook, "The merchant network in 16th century China – a discussion and translation of Zhang Han's 'On merchants,'" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 24, No. 2 (1981), pp. 165–214.

growth, and it assumes that peasant differentiation is a natural occurrence in peacetime. It is therefore not surprising that it cannot account for such important facts as the decreasing land per person ratio, the continuation of small-scale management, changes in tenancy and wage-labor rates, and other historically specific characteristics of the Chinese economy. These other historically specific characteristics include the socio-economic importance of degree holders, lineage landownership, and the great agricultural differences between the northern (wheat) and the southern (rice) agricultural systems. Instead of a dynastic cycle to explain socio-economic changes, throughout later imperial times one can broadly discern a linear trend in agricultural history towards intensification and commercialization, interlinked in complicated ways with more purely socio-economic trends.²⁹²

There can be no doubt that advances in agricultural productivity were made during the Ming period and that these advances allowed an unprecedentedly large number of people to be fed more or less adequately. That the Ming was stagnant is a biased view propagated by seventeenth-century savants, especially Ku Yen-wu (1613–82), and was a not purely economic view predicated on a hatred for the Manchus and on resentment toward the dynasty that had fallen to them.²⁹³ Whether productivity *per person* increased, remained unchanged, or decreased, is far more difficult to say. The answer must take into account both temporal and regional differences in such factors as increased social differentiation of labor, nonagricultural commercial pursuits, advances in agricultural practices of kinds that are not more labor-intensive (such as those brought about by introduction of new crops) and of course weather conditions. All these factors are relatively independent of each other, and trends in any of them were not necessarily linear. It is much safer to admit that we still do not know how the productivity or per capita income evolved, not even impressionistically, rather than to assume ahistorically a stagnant subsistence level, as some have done.²⁹⁴ We need not join the Chinese Marxist pessimists who say that

292 Support for such trends comes from varying ideological quarters: both orthodox Chinese Marxists and revisionist American scholars would support such a view.

293 This is also seen, for example, by the decidedly anti-Marxist scholar Thomas A. Metzger, "On the historical roots of economic modernization in China: The increasing differentiation of the economy from the polity during late Ming and early Ch'ing times." In *Modern Chinese economic history—proceedings of the conference on modern Chinese economic history*, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China, August 26–29, 1977, eds. Hou Chi-ming and Tzong-shian Yu (Taipei, 1977), pp. 3–21.

294 Perkins, *Agricultural development*, has done so; it should be pointed out that he set out to prove that there were agricultural advances *even assuming* that per capita production was and remained near subsistence level. His work cannot be taken to have *proved* that per capita production remained constant, as is often done. As there are many indications of different economic conjunctures at different times, the task before economic historians is now to identify these in time; i.e., when were there upswings and downswings.

there was an ever-increasing feudal exploitation of the masses who endured an ever-decreasing living standard²⁹⁵ or the American optimists who speak of a constantly “growing,” “highly complex” economy. It is often very sobering to read of the rather low levels of commercialization in nineteenth- and twentieth-century China, after centuries of such presumed vigorous growth.²⁹⁶ There are indications that after the economic growth of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the socio-economic structure had reached its limit in food productivity. Factors that point to this conclusion include the increased mortality and the lowering of life expectancy rates as we approach the Ch’ing period and the increased pressure from landlords and agricultural specialists to return to producing rice instead of cash crops.²⁹⁷ Economic factors are closely linked with social factors, and the limits reached do not necessarily imply a purely economic trap.

In Chiang-nan in the seventeenth century, and especially during the 1630s and 1640s,²⁹⁸ there was a widespread complaint that tenants grew too much cotton instead of the rice the landlords wanted. This complaint arose as a result of a complicated interplay of economic and social practices. Rent for land was paid in cotton, but in amounts fixed much earlier and not subject to change. The demand for rice and therefore the price of rice was high owing to bad harvests, population pressure, increases in the so-called *pai-liang* (“white grain” tax rice of the highest quality requisitioned by the court and paid in kind), and steeply rising war requisitions. The rents paid in cotton were no longer enough to cover these taxes and special levies, and landlords consequently were in trouble. On the other hand, the tenants suffered from a low demand for cotton, since most households had to use a larger part of their income for food. Increases in cotton productivity did not offset tenants’ losses from decreasing cotton prices. Yet cotton, when planted in combination with barley, wheat, and beans (which were not subject to rent payments) guaranteed cotton growers a minimum level of subsistence. A switch to rice production, on the other hand, involved rent payments. Rice also needed

295 In any case, it is difficult to reconcile this point of view with the belief that peasants always lived near subsistence levels.

296 This is not to deny that in some areas and at some times during the Ming and Ch’ing dynasties conditions might have been better than they were in the early twentieth century; but any notion of steady, linear economic growth should be discarded.

297 For one example, Hsü Kuang-ch’i (1562–33), compiler of the *Nung-cheng ch’üan-shu* (*Complete treatise on agronomics*, 1640), advised against the prevalent interplanting of cotton along with beans, because that practise was exhausting the soil. See his biography in Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 316–19.

298 See Kawakatsu Mamoru, “Minmatsu Shinsho, Chōkō deruta ni okeru mensaku to suiri,” *Kyūshū daigaku Tōyōshi ronshū*, 6 (October 1977), pp. 77–90; 8 (March 1980), pp. 98–101; and Kawakatsu Mamoru, “Minmatsu, Chōkō deruta no shakai to kōsei.” In *Nishijima Sadao hakushi kanreki kinen – Higashibō Ajia shini okeru kōkō to nōmin*, ed. Nishijima Sadao hakushi kanreki kinen ronsō henshū iinkai (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 487–515.

more irrigation than cotton, but the social mechanisms necessary to build and maintain irrigation systems or to rebuild them where they had broken down disappeared when the landlords who had supervised these activities moved elsewhere. Unlike earlier times when rice production was universal, water management had become more or less irrelevant for a large portion of the farming population. A return to rice production, which would have increased farmers' average income if done by everyone without exception, tended to encourage free riders who would profit more from an irrigation system in the short term the less work they did to develop or maintain it. By the same token, neglect on the part of one user could upset the functioning of an entire irrigation system. Cotton production thus continued for social reasons even when macro-economic profitability would have dictated otherwise.

The increase in the profitability of food production in the most advanced regions during the early seventeenth century (which implies a widespread population pressure under which diversification of production in the core regions could no longer be sustained by surplus production of food elsewhere) can also be observed beyond Chiang-nan. For example, in Fukien in 1615–17 there was continuous pressure from landlords who wanted to revert to share-cropping systems with payment in kind and to move away from fixed money rents, which many Marxist scholars consider historically more progressive, and they called on officials for help.²⁹⁹ The production surplus hitherto shared by landlords and tenants had apparently become so small that it was worth fighting for.

Francesca Bray has recently summed up the different mechanisms of agricultural advance that applied in the wheat and millet producing regions in the North and in the rice-growing regions in the South.³⁰⁰ She differs from some other experts in details, especially where she finds in agricultural differences the principal explanation for varying social developments in general, but most of her arguments are repeated by others from all positions in the ideological spectrum.

The North had reached its optimum technical development as early as the sixth century. The costs of supervision were high on the centrally managed wheat plantations, but through proper rotation (e.g. wheat or millet with soy beans or alfalfa) and better use of fertilizer, animals, and hired labor

299 Miki, "Minmatsu no Fukken ni okeru hōkōsei." Similar cases had occurred before at the very end of the sixteenth century. In those cases, the state, in the person of Hsü Fu-yüan, fearing landlord power, supported the tenants, and thereby increased the state's direct involvement in landlord-tenant relationships. See above.

300 Francesca Bray, *Agriculture*, part 2 of *Biology and biological technology*, vol. 6, ed. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge, 1984); see also Francesca Bray, "Patterns of evolution in rice-growing societies," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 11 (1983–84), pp. 3–33.

some economies of scale resulted, and profits from larger estates were greater than those from smaller farms.³⁰¹ The use of animals was important in the North, and their profitability greatest when the cultivated area was 100 *mu* or larger.³⁰² In periods of higher prices, landlords of larger estates employed hired labor or closely supervised share-croppers who grew their subsistence crops on their own plots. However, further development in the North was increasingly thwarted as the agricultural system in the South became much more profitable, and the attention of both the government and the wealthy was focused there.

Irrigation and the intensification of planting, which normally were cheaper than developing new areas, were far more important methods of increasing productivity in the South. Labor-intensive double cropping, useful so long as there was extra labor and soil fertility was not diminished, spread in Ming times from Kiangsu, Chekiang, and Fukien to Anhwei and even to some places in the Yellow River drainage. The onset of diminishing returns was delayed by the development of improved strains of rice as well as by the increased use of fertilizers.³⁰³ This delay even existed when more labor was involved in transplanting, weeding, and multi-cropping.³⁰⁴ In new paddy fields yields rose.

The optimum size for a unit of intensive rice cultivation by one male adult was about one *mu*, or one-sixth of an English acre. This optimum size did not change much through the centuries. Rather than machinery, which was of little or no use on small plots, successful cultivation required quality labor; tenancy was more profitable to the landowner than large-scale farming especially in areas of high population density, since supervising the work involved in rice cultivation was almost as expensive as doing it all oneself. Farm family income could be increased by engaging in the production of wine, bean curd, soy sauce, and pickled vegetables or by planting spring crops which were often exempted from rent. Changes in the available labor supply that resulted from family cycles led to a high turnover of land, and most families owned some land at least once every generation. Real serfdom was essentially incompatible with the overall circumstances

301 Whether these productivity advantages were purely technological or depended on differences in wealth (i.e., whether larger estates were more productive and therefore rich, or whether they were rich and therefore could achieve higher productivity) is open to debate. For an overview of this debate, see Ishida Hiroshi, "1930-nendai Kahoku mensaku chitai ni okeru nōminsō bunkai – toku ni Kitō nōson no 'funō' keiei no seikaku ni kanten shite 1930," *Ajia keizō*, 21, No. 12 (December 1980), pp. 48–62.

302 See Thomas B. Wiens, *The microeconomics of peasant economy, China, 1920–1940* (New York, 1982).

303 Methods of fertilizing included: burning stubble in the fields, applying manure, lime, pressed oil-seed and soybean waste, and plowing under crops grown as green manures.

304 See Francisca Bray's "Conclusions: agricultural changes and society – stagnation or reaction?" In *Science and Civilisation in China: Agriculture*, Vol. 6, ed. Needham, part 2, pp. 553–616.

of rice production, and known instances of quasi-serfdom almost always applied to conditions in the North or in the frontier and mountain areas. Share-cropping in Chiang-nan was rare.³⁰⁵ In these areas where cultivation was very labor-intensive, the late imperial period saw a clear trend toward fixed rents; this gave tenants an incentive to take some risks in order to increase their yields. Landowners, on the other hand, appear to have lost interest in investing in improvements to their land, since the difficulty of costly close supervision would mean that their investments would in the end only benefit the tenants. For commercial and political reasons, as we shall see, there were profits to be made in landownership, but closely managed estates were not profitable and did not develop.

In respect of agricultural improvements during the Ming, we can point to the spread of sorghum (*kao-liang*) in the North, which made up for grain deficiencies and was also used as animal fodder. Sorghum was especially useful because it could be grown in alkaline soils. The spread of cotton-growing has already been discussed. Sugar was important in the South, and refined white sugar manufacture commenced in the mid-sixteenth century in Kwangtung and Fukien. Glutinous rice, grown mainly for rice wine production, was widely cultivated in some areas, to the extent that in Shao-hsing, Chekiang, for example, ordinary rice for consumption had to be purchased from outside. Tea was a state monopoly in Shansi and Shensi and was needed to exchange for horses from beyond the Great Wall, but elsewhere it could be grown without restriction. Tea production flourished, especially in Kwangtung, Fukien, Anhwei, and Kiangsi, particularly after the trade with European countries began.³⁰⁶

Population growth and the resulting reliance upon labor-intensive agriculture in the South accounts for some characteristics which earlier authors saw as a sign of backwardness in Ming agriculture. Not only were there scarcely any newly developed or improved tools, but earlier, more impressive looking ones were even replaced in some cases by the simpler ones that employed human rather than animal power — human labor was cheaper.³⁰⁷ In the North, the long moldboard plow, in existence since T'ang times, spread

305 See Mi Chu Wiens, "The origins of modern landlordism." In *Shen Kang-po hsien-sheng pa-chih jung-ch'ing lun-wen-chi*, ed. Shen Kang-po hsien-sheng pa-chih jung-ch'ing lun-wen-chi pien-chi wei-yüan hui (T'ai-pei, 1976), pp. 289-344; and Kusano Yasushi, *Chügoku no jinushi keizai-bunshûsei* (Tokyo, 1985).

306 Amano Motonosuke, "Mindai no nōgyō to nōmin." In *Min-Shin jidai no kagaku gijyusubi*, eds. Yabuuchi Kiyoshi and Yoshida Mitsukuni (Kyōto, 1970), pp. 465-528.

307 Where rice and wheat were rotated, often no plows were used; but hoes or mattocks had to be employed where fertilizers were applied. In the *Shen-shih Nung-shu* (*The manual of agriculture by Master Shen*) we read that some 40 percent of the outlay of farmers went on fertilizers, and only 1 percent on tools.

very rapidly. It did not cut the earth very deeply, and it thereby prevented excessive evaporation in areas where the water supply was not very dependable. In contrast, in the South much deeper cultivation was required with the increased use of fertilizers, and simpler but cheaper and more effective tools such as the *t'ieh-ta* (iron plow) and the *yün-tang* (weeding mower) were adopted.³⁰⁸ Population pressure also caused intensification in the North, albeit on a different scale. From the tax reforms it is evident that in the North the original distinction between summer and winter land was gradually abolished as multi-cropping rotations increased in many areas.³⁰⁹

It was said that in Su-chou in southern Kiangsu the maximum size of a family farm with one ox or water buffalo was ten *mu*, and five *mu* without one. Other figures are similar or slightly higher – up to twenty or thirty *mu* where farming was less intensive.³¹⁰ These figures contrast strikingly with the situation during the Sung, when self-cultivated estates of from 60 to 100 *mu*, using oxen, were quite common.³¹¹ The large polders of the Sung, which had been created using state capital, were increasingly subdivided – a process made necessary because of population growth. The large noncultivated swamp and lake areas at the centers of the Sung polders were drained, and creeks were created that divided the Sung polders into smaller areas of

308 The same also applied in some places in the North; this was the case in core areas of Ho-nan and Shantung, which began multi-cropping during the Ming, often using beans as the second crop. For the tools, see Ōsawa Masaaki, "Chūgoku ni okeru shōkei hatten no sho dankai." In *Chūgoku shizō no saikōsei-kōkka to nōmin*, ed. Chūgokushi kenkyūkai (Kyōto, 1983), pp. 55–78; and also *Chung-kuo nung-yeh ching-chi fa-chan shih lüeh*, ed. Tu Hsiu-ch'ang (Hang-chou, 1984), pp. 171–76.

309 In the South, winter and summer taxes had been two different items assessed on the same piece of land. See also Kuroki Kuniyasu, "Ichijō benpō seiritsu no seisanryōkuteki kiso," *Mindaishi kenkyū* (November 1976), pp. 1–12.

310 Ho Liang-chün, in his *Ssu-yu ch'ai ts'ung shuo* (*Collected essays from the Ssu-yu studio*, (1579), 3/179, gives this figure in his native Sung-chiang (also the seat of Hua-t'ing county); see also Huang, *Taxation*, p. 41. For Ho (1506–73), see *DMB*, pp. 515–18.

311 Kuroki, "Ichijō benpō seiritsu." The extremely small scale of most cultivators is my reason for calling cultivators "peasants," even though some (but far from all) anthropologists are opposed to using the term when the cultivators are involved in market relationships, willingly or otherwise. Linda Grove and Joseph W. Esherick, "From feudalism to capitalism – Japanese scholarship on the transformation of Chinese rural society," *Modern China*, 6, No. 4 (October 1980), pp. 397–438, call Chinese cultivators "farmers" because they "treat crops, handicrafts, land, and labor as commodities, not as peasants far from the market." I find such a characterization overstated and would tend to limit the term "farmer" only to cases in which commercial cultivators operated in a purely capitalistic environment. Daniel Thorner, "Peasant economy as a category in economic history." In *Deuxième conférence internationale d'histoire économique, Aix-en-Provence, 1962, Vol. 2: Middle Ages and Modern Times* (Paris, 1965), pp. 287–300 or Maurice Aymard, "Autoconsommation et marchés: Chayanov, Labrousse ou Le Roy Ladurie?" *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 38, No. 6 (November–December 1983), pp. 1392–1410 ascribe "peasant economy" to exactly the kind of situation in which the Chinese cultivators existed, including its market and tax relationships. There are indications that throughout the Ming and Ch'ing most cultivators, except perhaps for the most commercialized areas in Chiang-nan, planted cash crops only when pressed and with reluctance. The distinction between the two terms is particular to English, and therefore of limited use anyway: not too much meaning should be attached to whether I use one or the other term in a given case.

200 to 500 *mu*. These creeks formed the basis of the transport network, and community structures arose along their banks.³¹² Where these Ming creeks were created from land that had originally been taxed, this tax was either abolished or redistributed over other land. In some cases, the creeks were owned communally, but in other cases, privately. The creeks provided fertilizer as well as drainage and were a major agricultural advance. Cotton was often grown along the dikes and embankments, since doing so made productive use of inferior soil and enabled mud from the creek bottoms to be conveniently used as fertilizer. The cotton was also easily transported.

The spread of Champa rice, which had been introduced into China during Sung times, had various causes. Being less light-dependent (and hence ripening more quickly), it could be planted and harvested before droughts or floods were expected, or after early floods had ruined crops. It would also grow on poorer soils. Initially considered very inferior in taste and difficult to keep, it was not usually taxed. This, together with the fact that it could be grown alternately with wheat, assured its continued use. Crop improvements from crossing strains resulted in the availability of still quicker-ripening varieties in the Ming. Areas devoted solely to growing Champa rice, however, switched gradually to the more profitable cotton, which shared some of the advantages of Champa rice but none of its disadvantages.³¹³

The last main area in which Ming agriculture showed improvement was the cultivation of mulberry trees for sericulture. Improved varieties became smaller and so could be harvested sooner and planted closer together. Consequently, profits from mulberry cultivation became competitive with those from producing rice.

The socio-economic facets of landownership

The size of landholdings

Modern authors treating the landholding system of the Ming have addressed various questions: the extent and evolution of landholdings; the relationships involved in landownership and tenancy; the differences between sizes of farmers' landholdings and the sizes, including the land they rented, of the actual

312 These settlements and the creeks were called *pang* (creek settlement) in the local dialect; see, for example, Hamashima, the main participant in a panel on the division of the large Sung polders into smaller Ming ones, Hamashima Atsutoshi, Morita Akira, and Kaida Yoshihiro, "Min-Shin jidai no bun'u o megutte – deruta kaitaku no shūyakuka," ch. 4 of *Chūgoku Kōnan no inasaku bunke – sono gakusaiteki kenkyū*, eds. Watanabe Tadayo and Sakurai Yumio (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 171–232; and Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson*, esp. ch.2, and the maps provided.

313 See the articles in Watanabe Tadayo and Sakurai Yumio, eds., *Chūgoku Kōnan no inasaku bunke – sono gakusaiteki kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1984), including the one cited in the preceding note.

farms they worked; the place of landlords, self-cultivators, and tenants in community regulations, and the like. The various aspects of these issues are difficult to separate one from another or from other more properly social or political factors, but an attempt will be made here to treat some of them one by one.

A major debate continues over what the trend was with regard to the evolving size of landholdings, a debate which has given rise to different opinions about such factors as the general level of subsistence, the social position of tenants, and related matters. The points of view concerning these issues might be classified into three main groups.

One group³¹⁴ has seen an increase in the concentration of land in the hands of fewer people under the simultaneous conditions of a free land market and of tax exemptions granted to degree holders and officials. Such landlords might use hired labor,³¹⁵ even bondservants, to work this land, but more commonly they relied on tenants, and a sign of their increasing distance from actual cultivation was the movement away from having their tenants share-crop toward having them pay fixed rents, sometimes even in cash. Normal tenants would only be able to evolve into rich tenants who hired their own labor in special cases. In mountainous areas, for example, the long time it took for saplings to mature into commercially sold wood and the consequent delay in any return on investments made landowners, often resident elsewhere, willing to rent out such otherwise useless lands to entrepreneurial tenants on favorable terms.³¹⁶

A second idiosyncratic but vocal opinion has been offered by the Japanese scholar Oyama Masaaki, who sees the main trend in landholding during the Ming as a movement away from a paternalistic, landlord-dominated system under which the majority of cultivators were utterly unable to sustain themselves without constant assistance from their landlords, toward a system under which tenants³¹⁷ increasingly became able (albeit barely able) to reach

314 Li Wen-chih, "Lun Chung-kuo ti-chu ching-chi-chih yü nung-yeh tzu-pen-chu-i meng-ya," *Chung-kuo she-hui k'o-hsiieh*, 1 (1981), pp. 1-18, rpt. with 1987 postface in his *Ming-Ch'ing shih-tai feng-chien t'u-ti kuan-hsi ti tung-chieh* (Pei-ching, 1993), pp. 546-81, is a representative figure.

315 The so-called managerial landlords, who hired laborers to engage in agriculture, were rare.

316 See Fu I-ling, "Ts'ung Chung-kuo li-shih ti tsao-shu-hsing lun Ming-tai shih-tai," in his *Ming-Ch'ing she-hui ching-chi pien-ch'i ienshib* (Pei-ching, 1989), pp. 3-19, trans. as "Capitalism in Chinese agriculture - On the laws governing its development," trans. S. T. Leong, *Modern China*, 6, No. 3 (July 1980), pp. 311-16.

317 Oyama actually used the term serf (*nôdo*), taking his cue from the work of Araki Moriaki on Japan. For early Ming tenants and servants he uses the unexplained term slave (*dorei*). Shigeta Atsutoshi has followed Oyama's terminology. See Shigeta Atsushi, "Kyôson shihai no seiritsu to kôzô," in *Higashi Ajia Sekai no tenkaia II*, Iwanami kôza Sekai rekishi, 12: Chûsei 6 (Tokyo, 1971), pp. 347-80; rev. ed. in his *Shindai shakai keizai shi kenkyû* (Tokyo, 1975), pp. 155-206, trans. as part of "The origins and structure of gentry rule," trans. Christian Daniels, in *State and society in China - Japanese perspectives on Ming-Qing social and economic history*, eds. Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 335-85.

subsistence levels through intensified and commercialized agriculture. Such tenants gradually became able to organize communities by themselves, while the remaining rural landlords had to intensify production and had to begin to rely on hired labor that was less costly and better skilled than the “slaves” of the early Ming.

Oyama's theory, while influential and used in some Western books,³¹⁸ in large measure has been dismissed or has had to be modified.³¹⁹ We have already seen that the administrative community (*li-chia*) system was not composed of great slave-owning landlords, but was composed mostly of peasants working on small landholdings. There is no reason to suppose that tenants were only able to reach subsistence level, but were never capable of going beyond that barrier. Also, in some important senses tenants were independent: tenant contracts were after all contracts, even in the case of the extremely unequal share-cropping systems in the North.

The theory proposed by Chao Kang is more convincing. He argues that population growth alone should be sufficient to explain why unsupervised tenancy rose during the late Ming. The organization of labor on family-run farms where all members of a family participated in cultivating the farm makes it possible for the marginal product of labor (i.e., the product resulting from the labor of an additional individual) to fall below the subsistence level. Even though such an additional person, perhaps a child, would add through its labor to the total income, the person would consume more than she or he would produce. A family might accept such an uneconomical situation in the case of children, since a child would have to consume in any case. However, it would not make economic sense to hire an outside laborer who would cost more in food and wages than he would produce in income. Only within families, therefore, is it possible to employ labor that produces less than it costs when measured in purely economic terms. Unless the falling

318 For example, see Elvin, *The pattern of the Chinese past*, and Robert Marks, *Rural revolution in South China: peasants and the making of history in Hai Feng county, 1570-1930* (Madison, 1984).

319 For some critics see Tsurumi Naohiro, “Gyorinsatsu o tazunete,” Tsurumi Naohiro, “Mindai ni okeru kyōson shihai;” Mori Masao, “Iwayuru ‘kyōshinteki tochi shoyū’ron o megutte – aikai yohi hōkoku ni kaete,” *Rekishi hyōron*, 304 (August 1975), pp. 11-16; Mori Masao, “Nihon no Min-Shin jidai shi kenkyū ni okeru kyōshinron ni tsuite,” *Rekishi hyōron* 308 (December 1975), pp. 40-60; 312 (April 1976), pp. 74-84; 314 (June 1976), pp. 113-280; Adachi Keiji, “Min-Shin jidai no shōhin seisan to jinushisei kenkyū o megutte,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 36, No. 1 (June 1977), pp. 125-35; Furushima Kazuo, “Kyū Chūgoku ni okeru tochi shoyū to sono seikaku,” *Chūgoku nōson kakumei no tenkai* (1972), rpt. in his *Chūgoku kindai shakai shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1982), pp. 3-33; Kitamura, “Minmatsu-Shinsho ni okeru jinushi ni tsuite,” pp. 18-49; Terada Takanobu, “Shōhin seisan to jinushisei o meguru kenkyū – Min-Shin shakai keizai kenkyūshi no shomondai (1),” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 19, No. 4 (March 1961), pp. 502-11; Yasuno Shōzō, “Jinushi no jittai to jinushi sei kenkyū no aida,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 33, No. 3 (December 1974), pp. 183-91; Okuzaki, *Chūgoku kyōshin jinushi*; and Amano, “Mindai no nōgyō.” Most cases cited by Oyama prove to be atypical, heterogeneous, and tendentiously explained.

rate of the marginal product of labor was offset by other factors (economies of scale, in the case of sugar, tobacco, and fruit plantations in the South, or wheat farms in the North, or better access to the market), in the rice-producing South the number of managerial landlords who had to pay each additional hired worker at least the cost of subsistence consumption should have decreased rather than increased.³²⁰

Furthermore, a population increase not only lowers wages, it also increases the demand for land, thereby raising rents and making leasing out land more attractive at the higher rates that increased demand makes possible. In the northern wheat region, labor was not as intensive, relatively speaking, and therefore not as important as it was in the south. Also, necessary items for cultivation such as tools and animals were often the property of landlords. Thus, the need for supervision was a continued possibility. These factors, and the presence of higher risks such as unreliable rainfall, coupled with landlords' and tenants' desires for stable incomes provided pressures from both landlords and tenants to have direct stakes in the outcome of cultivation by sharing the risks. Thus, a share-cropping system resulted, even though it was often highly favorable to the landowner when he possessed the tools and animals necessary for the agricultural work in addition to the land. On the other hand, in the intensively cultivated southern areas where agricultural risks were fewer, the costs of supervision were higher, since rice agriculture is more labor intensive. Whether a hired laborer worked hard or not was of very great importance for the harvest, and the danger always existed that once subsistence was assured (and this was much more likely in the South owing to its better climate), unless closely supervised, laborers would not have any incentive to continue to increase the harvest, especially if the landlord would receive the lion's share of the extra product. Seeking at the same time to avoid these costs of supervision and to provide incentives to ensure that tenants would continue to improve the land and increase its value, landlords found it profitable to charge fixed rents, leaving to the tenants both the risk of harvest failure and whatever surplus resulted when harvests were good. When fixed rents were charged, it was also not necessary to determine the amount harvested annually, as was the case with share-cropping. Moreover, the land could even increase in value in the long run simply through the regular addition of fertilizer, etc.

³²⁰ Chao Kang and Ch'en Chung-i, *Chung-kuo t'ü-ti chih-t'ushih* (T'ai-pei, 1982), ch. 5; such an explanation invalidates the classic Chinese Marxist position that managerial landlords are a sign of progress.

The increase in the number of bondservants in the late Ming, many of whom were not engaged in agricultural production, should therefore be explained by political rather than by purely economic reasons.³²¹ As long as marginal productivity did not fall to zero, no Malthusian state of crisis, in which the usual exponential increase in population had passed the point at which the usual linear increase in production could support it, was reached, even when average productivity fell.³²²

Tenants and bondservants

While not forgetting that *social* classes were based upon many noneconomic factors (such as literacy), it is very useful for some purposes to classify the Ming rural population into socio-economic groups with respect to landholding.

We have already mentioned on several occasions a trend towards an increase in socially differentiated landownership, beginning with a preponderance of owner-cultivators alongside some not-so-large landowners in the early Ming.³²³

More specific data are available. In 1379, in the whole of China, there were only 14,241 households that possessed more than 700 *mu*. These figures indicate that on average there were not more than ten such households per county. Even in Sung-chiang in Chiang-nan there were no more than 250 households owning over 1000 *mu*.³²⁴ In 1570, the largest landowner in China possessed 70,000 *mu*, and the largest in Ch'ang-chou, 20,000. Even then, only a very few large individual landowners owned more than 10,000 *mu*.³²⁵ Tenancy (either

321 Also T'an Ti-hua, Huang Ch'i-ch'en, and Yeh Hsien-en, "Liu Yung-ch'eng chu 'Ch'ing-tai ch'ien-ch'i nung-yeh tzu-pen chu-i meng ya ch'u-t'an' p'ing-chia," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi li-shih yen-chiu*, 1 (1983), pp. 122–25, in a review of Liu Yung-ch'eng, *Ch'ing-tai ch'ien-ch'i nung-yeh tzu-pen chu-i meng-yach'u-t'an* (Fu-chou, 1982), point to the fact that the presence of hired labor depended on recurring disasters rather than on a linear economic trend. Cities were as yet unable to absorb this chronically reconstituted dispossessed stratum.

322 Occurring cyclical patterns are, for Chao, the result of wars rather than of internal factors. See Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo t'u-ti chih-tu shih*, ch. 8. Also note that the increase in the number of tenants does not by itself say anything about their social position or bargaining power, or about the cycles in landownership: "tenancy" did not have to be a life-long condition and it was certainly not the worst condition. Tenancy could adapt better to the family cycle and other conditions. A growing percentage of land under tenancy, or an increasing average size of landholding are matters of landownership and not of farm size, which is a matter of management.

323 Even the "large landowners" of Oyama sometimes own no more than 20 *mu*. See Oyama Masaaki, "Minmatsu Shinsho no daitochi shoyū: toku ni Kōnan deruta chitai o chūshin ni shite," *Shigaku zasshi* 66, No. 12 (December 1957), pp. 1–30; 67, No. 1 (January 1958), pp. 50–72, trans. as "Large landownership in the Jiangnan delta region during the late Ming–Early Qing period," trans. Christian Daniels, in *State and society in China—Japanese perspectives on Ming–Qing social and economic history*, eds. and trans. Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 101–63.

324 See Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo t'u-ti chih-tu shih*, p. 213.

325 Huang, *Taxation*, pp. 156–8. Landlord property books from Hui-chou also list small landlords; moreover, they only show very small turnovers from year to year.

in the sense of the percentage of households renting land or in the sense of percentage of land cultivated by tenants) might have increased; but it is not necessary to assume a simultaneous increase in the average amount of landholding: a rise in the productivity of land enables more people to rent out the land they own and lowers the threshold at which landlordism becomes possible.

A group of socially inferior, very servile tenants existed in various parts in China. Their origin is still an enigma, and they retained this status even after their "liberation" in the Ch'ing period. They were an exceptional group and were to be found only in certain geographically limited areas, the most famous being Hui-chou, Ning-kuo, and Ch'ih-chou prefectures in Anhwei, and Mach'eng county in Hupei.³²⁶ Many of them had sold themselves and carefully kept their copies of the bill of sale. They could own property, but customarily or contractually had to perform demeaning work and services quite beyond the scope of normal tenants.³²⁷

Some of these bondservants who had sold themselves were not unlike poor, long-term hired laborers, but others could become rich managers of shops or overseers of tenants.³²⁸ In any case, they were of minor importance overall.

The total percentage of land held by degree holders³²⁹ increased gradually yet noticeably during the second part of the Ming. Their statutory immunity from corporal punishment made the influence of degree holders important for lineage members, bondservants, and "commended" rich households alike.³³⁰ The increase in land holding by degree holders and

³²⁶ Other examples: T'ai-ho (Kiangsi), Nan-hai (Kwangtung), Nan-yang (Honan), Chiang-chou (present-day Hsin-chiang, Shansi), and Lei-yang (Hu-nan).

³²⁷ Most often they are called *tien-pu*, but terms and categories are vague and overlapping. Legally, they were not all *nu-p'u* (slaves or bondservants), who were only allowed to officials of rank 3 and higher after 1397. The most important characteristic of their status is the use of graveyards belonging to their landlord's family, in return for which they had entered into servile relationships. Sometimes those obligations continued for several generations, and lineage-to-lineage servility, the so-called *shih-p'u*, could develop. See Yeh Hsien-en, *Ming-Ch'ing Hui-chou nung-t's'un she-hui yü tien-p'u-chih* ([Ho-fei], 1983), or Keith Duane Hazelton, "Lineages and local elites in Hui-chou, 1500-1800" (Diss., Princeton University, 1983), p. 200. However, even the persons with the legal status of *nu-p'u* were never physically owned in China, and could, for example, not be killed at will.

³²⁸ Tanaka, "Minpen-kōso nuhen;" and Joseph P. McDermott, "Bondservants in the T'ai-hu Basin during the late Ming: a case of mistaken identities," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 40, No. 4 (August 1981), pp. 673-701.

³²⁹ And other types of tax exempt land: for example, land designated for salt production in the Liang-Huai salt area. Even the yamen clerks had some limited exemptions.

³³⁰ Chao Kang has argued that, after the single-whip reforms, one could simply sell the land and cease to have any obligation to perform the onerous corvée duties. Under such conditions, personal commendation would become less rational. See Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo t'u-ti chih-tu shih*, ch. 7. But one would rather suppose that to richer commoner households who, at most, paid a fee and did not experience any personal servility, the commendation of land remained attractive.

their influence notwithstanding,³³¹ the landholdings of most landlords remained small.

The relationship between normal tenants and their landlords was contractual³³² if unequal: a junior-senior relationship existed between a tenant and his own landlord.³³³ Outside of some contractually stipulated services, tenants did not have to perform any other special services. Landlords realized early on that demanding too much would interfere with prompt rent payments.³³⁴ Rents in Chiang-nan, which were mostly, but not exclusively, levied only on the main grain crop, generally comprised some 50 to 60 percent of the harvest and were originally paid in kind. With the increase in the number of absentee landlords, fixed rents paid in kind or money became more prevalent.³³⁵

Although they eliminated a landlord's supervision costs, fixed rents led to a decrease in a landlords' real income at a time when prices were rising. Consequently, in the late Ming, landlords tried to offset this decline in income by asking for rent deposits,³³⁶ for fees when contracts were renewed, or for subsidiary rents.³³⁷ They encountered considerable opposition. Resistance against these rent increases became widespread and continued unabated until the K'ang-hsi period (1662–1722).³³⁸ Rents *per se* were rarely the focus of resistance movements.

The increased participation of tenants in the market, the increased turnover in the land market, which made any landlord/tenant relationship likely to be only temporary, the sheer increase in the numbers of tenants, and the increased distance of the absentee landlord from his tenants produced a

331 Even Li Wen-chih, foremost proponent of the "increased land concentration" theory, admits this to have been the case. See Li Wen-chih, "Lun Ch'ing-tai ch'ien-ch'i ti t'u-ti chan-yu kuan-hsi," *Li-shihyen-chiu*, 5 (1963), pp. 75–107, p. 100.

332 See Fu-mei Chang Chen, "A preliminary analysis of tenant-landlord relationships in Ming and Qing China" (Paper prepared for the Symposium on social and economic history of China from the Song Dynasty to 1900, Beijing, October 26–November 1980).

333 Exceptions do occur, as, for example, in the wine-drinking ceremony in Wu-chiang. See Mori Masao, "Minmatsu no shakai kankei ni okeru chitsujo no hendō ni suite," pp. 135–59. There were also exceptions among the powerless small tenant stratum in North China. In the Ming encyclopedia *Pien-min t'u-t'uan* (*Illustrated compendium for the people's convenience*), tenants and hired laborers participated as equals. See Tsurumi, "Mindai ni okeru kyōson shihai."

334 Wei Chin-yü, "Ming Ch'ing shih-tai tien-nung ti nung-nu ti-wei," *Li-shihyen-chiu*, 5 (1963), pp. 109–34.

335 Not all tenants of the same landlord had identical rent contracts and re-negotiation was possible: see Fu-mei Chang Chen, "Tenant-landlord relationships" and Chao, *Man and land in Chinese history*.

336 This was especially true in Fukien, Kiangsi, and Kiangsu.

337 These subsidiary rents were small according to Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *Agricultural change and the peasant economy of South China, Harvard East Asian Series*, 66 (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), but Mi Chu Wiens, "Lord and peasant, the sixteenth to the eighteenth century," *Modern China*, 6, No. 1 (January 1980), pp. 3–39, argues persuasively that if such subsidiary rents did not count, they would hardly have been the stated cause of several widespread tenant rebellions.

338 Other targets of these movements were residual mandatory labor services, or the fraudulent manipulation of certain grain measurements.

community where tenants were no longer a marginal population: they formed their own organizations with or without governmental help. During the sixteenth century, tenants defrayed the bulk of the cost of irrigation projects, while the many anti-rent revolts show that a quite sophisticated network existed among tenants in villages. On the other hand, the increased independence of tenants did not necessarily raise their average income: increases in productivity could be offset by a deteriorating land per person ratio, and increased market participation could be attended by increased risks. Because of a greater pressure to obtain cash to pay rents and debts, the reliance on landlords was replaced by a reliance on merchants and usurer-landlords, and drops in the price of cotton cloth or rice could very well be disastrous. Pawnhouse owners and rice brokers became important figures for both small landowners and tenants.

There is, therefore, some truth to both of the competing theories that propose to explain the evolution of the tenants' economic position. Proponents of the theory that the tenants' position improved point to the increase in fixed rents (which assured that increases in productivity went to the tenants), the absenteeism of many landlords (which decreased direct control and supervision), the rise in "permanent" tenancy, and the increase in double cropping when the second crop normally was not subject to rent to support their view. Opponents of the improvement theory list as factors supporting their point of view the increase in the concentration of land in the hands of landlords and the consequent increase in the absolute and relative number of tenants, the existence of a middle layer in landownership that doubled the rents for the lower strata of tenants,³³⁹ the decrease in the land per person ratio, and the efforts by landlords to increase rents.

One way to reconcile these two theories is to consider more fully the effects of geography: different areas afforded tenants different ways to participate in the market. In some areas in Szechwan or Hu-kuang, landlords were better positioned to participate in the market (in this case the rice market) than were tenants and were also well positioned to use such items as rent deposits to offset the risk of tenants defaulting on rent. When official control was weak, resident landlords armed and powerful, and labor in short supply and therefore much sought after, very servile conditions could be imposed on tenants: such conditions obtained in the backward mountainous areas of these provinces.³⁴⁰ Elsewhere, mountainous areas

339 This is a point always stressed by Fu I-ling, "Ch'ing-tai Yung-an nung-ts'un p'ei-t'ien yüeh ti yen-chiu," in his *Ming-Ch'ing nung-ts'un she-hui ching-chi* (Pei-ching, 1961), pp. 44–59, but also noted by Shinigū Taiji, "Mindai Fukken no nōka keizai – toku ni ichiden sanshu no kankō ni tsuite," *Shigaku zasshi*, 63, No. 7 (July 1954), pp. 1–21, and Kataoka Shibako, "Fukken no ichiden ryōshusei ni tsuite," *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, 294 (November 1964), pp. 42–49.

340 See Shigeta Atsushi, "Shinsho ni okeru Konan beishijō."

could also sustain an unusually diversified economy. After an initial costly cash outlay, it could be much more profitable for a landlord to settle for a fixed money rent, in return for which the tenant would be given the right of permanent tenancy, than for the landlord to continue to share the work. This was the case with timber, which required years to mature.³⁴¹ A stratum of rich tenants could and did exist in the mountainous, timber-producing regions, and they often functioned as secondary landlords over poor, migrant labor.³⁴² When tenants reclaimed land without help from landlords or the government, their rights to that land would be upheld by the government if they had taken the trouble to have the land surveyed, registered and taxed; it was beneficial to pay taxes.

Reclaiming land was often a way to secure permanent tenancy rights. In many cases, landlords could not evict their tenants from such reclaimed land, and tenants themselves could transfer their cultivation rights one to another.³⁴³ Another form of land ownership was the so-called multiple land-ownership system, which appeared earliest in Fukien. It might be overstating the case to call the middle layer of tenants there tenants in the ordinary sense: many of them were landlords and merchants who had inserted themselves between old landlords and their tenants by settling for lower deposits but requiring higher rents from those to whom they in turn subleased the

341 The opposite, shared harvests, also occurred when landlords were more directly interested. See Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo 'u-ti chih-tu shih*, ch. 7.

342 In Kiangsi, for example, these migrants came from Fukien and Kwangtung. See Kataoka, "Fukken no ichiden ryōshusei." Names used included *p'eng-min* (hut people), *ching-k'o* (grass guests), *ma-min* (hemp people), *lan-hu* (indigo households). These rich tenants often became the leaders of tenant revolts, as in east Chekiang in the Ch'ung-chen (1628–44) reign. See Fu I-ling, "Ming-Ch'ing chih chi ti 'nu-pien' ho tien-nung chieh-fang yü-n-tung," in his *Ming-Ch'ing nung-ts'un she-hui ching-chi* (Pei-ching, 1961), pp. 68–153.

343 Permanent tenancy was not, as often is maintained, a distinct second type of landownership: *de jure* it only existed on condition that the stipulated rent was paid. See Fu-mei Chang Chen and Ramon H. Myers, "Customary law and the economic growth of China during the Ch'ing period," *Ch'ing-shih wen-i*, 3, No. 5 (November 1976) pp. 1–32; 3, No. 10 (December 1978), pp. 4–27, or Niida Noboru, "Min-Shin jidai no ichiden ryōshu shūkan to sono seiritsu," *Hōgokukai zasshi*, 64, No. 3 ([1946]), 64, No. 4 ([1946]), rpt. in his (*Hotei*) *Chūgoku hōseishi ken'yū: Chūgoku hōseishi ken'yū: Tōchihō Torihikihō* (first ed. 1960; Tōkyō, 1981), pp. 164–215. In fact, however, even when rent arrearages occurred, ignorance of the location of the tenant or fear of being unable to find better tenants (Sometimes villages conspired against landlords by refusing to cultivate the land of evicted tenants; see Kataoka, "Fukken no ichiden ryōshusei.") could cause the landlord to acquiesce. Indeed, rent deposits were required against just this possibility. The right to cultivate a piece of land was thus not necessarily transferrable for money. See Wiens, "The origins of modern landlordism," p. 336. Whether a landlord could repurchase his full rights over a given plot and whether it was possible to evict a tenant for non-payment of rent is hotly debated. In other words, for some, the extent to which "property" was involved is still debatable. For a legal overview including both sides, see Terada Hiroaki, "Denmen dentei kankō no hōteki seikaku – Gainenteki na bunseki o chūshin to shite," *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjō kijiō*, 93 (November 1983), pp. 33–131.

land.³⁴⁴ In such cases, the price for this “middle right” to land (involving rent receipts, but no tax payments – which remained for the original landowner to pay) could be much higher than the price for “real” ownership (that is, ownership that involved tax payments). In such areas as Fukien, where urban merchants had a surplus of cash, these middle rights were objects of investment, and the rural tenant became more independent even though he paid more in rent, while the control of the original rural taxpaying landlords over such tenants was weakened.³⁴⁵ The increased use of money also resulted in a faster turnover of land; this often occurred without the knowledge of the original landowner and obscured the identity of the actual cultivator. Later contracts, consequently, often forbade multiple landownership.³⁴⁶

There were other ways by which rights of permanent tenancy were acquired. When not themselves engaged in agriculture, military households sometimes willingly gave or sold permanent rights of tenancy to their land for fixed rents. Temples were sometimes willing to assume official ownership of the land of peasants in exchange for some rent; the peasants in return obtained permanent tenancy rights and were released from paying the miscellaneous corvée levies after the agreement was struck, since temple land was exempted from such corvée.³⁴⁷ The fact that a right of re-purchase customarily existed provides another example of how several distinct rights might accrue to the same piece of land.

Multiple land-ownership

We have already seen that the arrangements providing permanent tenancy rights are often confused with the multiple ownership system prevalent in Fukien. Permanent tenancy involved one landlord and one tenant, owed its origin to the social and economic factors mentioned above (absentee landlordism, land reclamation), and originally involved no right to sub-lease.

344 Ng Chin-keong [Wu Chen-ch'iang], “A study on the peasant society of South Fukien, 1506–1644,” *Nan-yang ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao (jen-wen k'o-hsüeh)*, 6 (1972), pp. 189–213, is quite right to point out that Rawski, *Agricultural change*, has often too easily equated increased tenant security with this type of middle, nontaxpaying landowner, and that much more caution is called for. See also Ng Chin-keong, *Trade and society: the Amoy network on the China coast, 1683–1735* (Singapore, 1983).

345 See Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo t'u-ti chih-tu shih*, ch. 4. Much of the land in Min-ch'ing, Min-hsien, and Hou-kuan counties (the last two with their seats in Fu-chou itself) was owned by Fu-chou landowners for example. See Lin Hsiang-jui, “Fu-chien yung-tien-ch'üan ch'eng-yin ti ch'u-pu k'ao-ch'a,” *Chung-kuo-shih yen-chiu*, 4 (1982), pp. 62–74. Similar conditions prevailed in Chien-yang as early as in 1449; Shimizu Taiji, “Mindai Fukken no nōka keizai.”

346 Chen and Myers, “Customary law,” or Kataoka, “Fukken no ichiden ryōshusei.”

347 In Lung-hsi, seat of Chang-chou prefecture, and Nan-ching thirty to forty percent of all land was temple land. The practice seems similar to commendation, but it seems that the term “commendation” usually referred to small landowners who commended small amounts of land to official households and entered into more servile relationships. When richer, and more influential commoner households commended their land, less servility obtained, and permanent tenancy might have resulted.

Multiple landownership involved at least three levels of participants and was closely linked with issues concerning tax payment. Often, there was an intermediate participant who had insinuated himself between the original landowner and tenant, receiving rents but paying no taxes. Multiple landownership was a response to overpopulation and dispersed the rights to land throughout a larger group of people than otherwise would have been possible. It is no coincidence that the examples of multiple landownership during the Ming were mainly confined to Fukien, where the land per person ratio was one of the worst in the empire, where surplus merchant capital was available, and where it could be more readily invested in land than in local industries. The result of the land per person ratio in that area was a heightened competition for limited resources.

Contemporary writers were aware of this: a passage in the *Wu-tsa-tsu* (*five mixed platters*)³⁴⁸ mentions that in Chiang-nan the land tax was too high and the profit to be gained from farming too low to warrant merchant investment. In Shansi and Shensi, farm productivity was too low and risk of bad weather high; farther south in Kiangsi and Hu-kuang there was still so much land available that rice was cheap and land was not considered a prestigious investment. Only in Fukien and Kwangtung were land taxes not too high, prices just right, and profits still to be made. As a result, only there did officials and merchants invest in land.

There were several different types of multiple landownership.³⁴⁹ In all cases, as far as the government was concerned the real landowner was the one obliged to pay the taxes, without respect to whether he was in fact the most powerful claimant to the land, received most of the income from it, or was forced to pay the rent by someone more powerful than himself.³⁵⁰

348 Written by Hsieh Chao-che (1567–1624). See *DMB*, pp. 346–50. The passage, from chs. 4/2, is discussed in many articles. See, for example, Kataoka, “Fukken no ichiden ryōshusei.”

349 Chang Pin-ts'un has given perhaps the best overview of the problem; see Chang Pin-ts'un, “Shih-liu, -ch'i shih-chi Chung-kuo ti i-ko ti-ch'üan wen-t'i: Fu-chien-sheng Ch'ang-chou-fu ti i-t'ien-san-chu-chih,” *Shih-huo yieh-k' an*, 14, No. 2 (May 1984), pp. 95–107.

350 Many authors have not understood the terms for the different types of rent involved. *Liang* (meaning food grain, but also, in the Ming, autumn tax) was used to refer to the taxes due the government. *Shui* (normally meaning summer tax or tax *tout court*), was consistently used in this system to refer to the rent due by the cultivator to the nominal landowner of record, the *ta-tsu-chu* (large rent owner). Other terms do occur, but an effort by Shimizu Taiji to link the various terms in a consistent way with different origins was not totally successful. *Tsu* (rent) was the term for the larger amount due to the middle owner: the *hsiao-tsu-chu* (small rent owner). For the terms “topsoil” (the right of the middle landowner) and “subsoil” (the right of the nominal landowner), also used in the case of permanent tenancy, several Chinese terms existed. These varied from place to place, sometimes having exactly opposite meanings in adjacent regions. The term *t'ien-mien* (topsoil; lit.: surface soil), could also be used for subsoil! Other frequently encountered terms include *t'ien-p'i* (land skin), *t'ien-ku* (land bones), or *t'ien-ken* (land roots). Depending on how an author views the right of the bottom cultivators, the system is called *i-t'ien liang/san-chu* (one field, two/three owners) in modern Chinese.

Multiple landownership existed as early as in 1472 in Ch'ang-t'ai, but the practice only became widespread throughout the whole of Fukien during the sixteenth century.³³¹

One of the origins of multiple landownership occurred in the case of an original landowner who sold his right and tax obligations cheaply to another person, who then became the *ta-tsu-chu* (taxpayer) and who might be in an unenviable position, unless he was tax exempt himself,³³² or possessed either armed forces, or a well-oiled rent collection organization that could be expected to raise more rent than was contracted for. In the last situation, the taxpayer (*ta-tsu-chu*) relied on a fourth person, a *pai-tui* (unofficial exchanger), as a "rent-farmer." However, rent payments more often went from the tenant via the middleman to the taxpayer, or alternatively from the tenant to the middleman and to the taxpayer separately.

In a second, more prevalent type of multiple landownership, the original landlord was forced by circumstances to remain the taxpayer (*ta-tsu-chu*) and had to sell the tax-free, rent-receiving middle level rights to others, often to urban merchants, who were frequently said to take advantage of every rural crisis to acquire these rights from local farmers in distress. Such land ended up remaining registered under the name of a person who, although he no longer controlled the land, was obliged to pay the taxes assessed on it while the real landlord paid none. Complaints about "empty registration" (*hsü-hsüan*) in contemporary sources often do not simply refer to a general disarray of the tax registers, but instead to this specific situation.

In these ways, taxes and real landownership (i.e., income) become rather tenuously related, and the government repeatedly tried to bring the two into a closer relationship. Lo Ch'ing-hsiao's (*chin-shih* of 1562) efforts for reform in 1573 are the most renowned for the attempt to do this, but there were quite a few others.³³³ As the only seemingly fair solution, the magistrates tried to allocate taxes on the basis of the value of the original investment in a piece of land; but such efforts were bound to be too complicated to be successful. These efforts also had the effect of upsetting the delicate balance of land prices that was related to the various rights and duties in the system.³³⁴

331 Often 1558 in Lung-yen is taken as the "real" beginning, since the reference to 1472 was in the context of its abolition. See Ng, *Trade and society*. See also Ng, "Peasant society of South Fu-chien," and Chang Pin-ts'un, "Chung-kuo ti i-ko ti-ch'üan wen-t'i."

332 Kusano Yasushi, "Minmatsu Shinsho-ki ni okeru denmen no henshitsu – Shōshūfukai o chūshin," *Kumamoto daigaku bungakubu ronsō*, 5 (March 1981), pp. 24–68, p. 38, sees the typical gentry member here rather than in the middle position.

333 For example, in 1545 in P'ing-ho, in 1569 in Nan-ching, and 1573 in Chang-chou. See Chang Pin-ts'un, "Chung-kuo ti i-ko ti-ch'üan wen-t'i."

334 See Kusano, "Denmen no henshitsu."

*Agriculture and land regimes: regional variations**North China*

The patterns of land ownership varied in the different regions of the country according to main crop patterns on the one hand and economic development on the other. The discussion that follows is a brief overview of some broadly and impressionistically defined regions designed to avoid even broader generalizations about land and its use during the Ming period.

It is often stated with regard to the twentieth century that, in northern China, owner-cultivators were more prevalent than in southern areas and that this fact might have come about owing to the differences between the requirements for growing wheat or millet and the requirements for growing rice. Not much attention, however, has been given to conditions in earlier periods.³⁵⁵ It is generally agreed that while owner-cultivators were more prevalent, the difference between large landowners and smaller ones was greater in the North, especially in less commercialized areas.

This situation might be linked to agricultural practices in the following manner. In general, wheat, millet, and some fodder crops form the main products of northern China. Because large parts of the land were left fallow every year, one crop a year on the average was most common until the early Ch'ing period.³⁵⁶ Animals were very important for plowing, for transportation, and for producing fertilizer. The optimum use of these animals meant that an area of 100 to 300 or at most 400 to 500 *mu*, was the most economical size for a farm, even though several peasants cultivating smaller farms could pool their resources to buy a team of animals themselves. As a result, landlords in the North generally had larger average landholdings than those in the South. Since a higher percentage of all farm land in the North was owned by such landlords, they were a more conspicuous presence in the social landscape there.

These powerful landlords used both more permanent laborers (*huo-chi*), and overseers on their estates. The overseers managed the necessary plowing, hoeing, and weeding, and were partly paid in cash. Adachi Keiichi has shown from some northern early Ch'ing agricultural books that although these activities were riddled with cash transactions, the goal of these estates was self-sufficiency, and this surplus farm produce was either consumed locally or

355 Some authors who have devoted research to this question are Adachi Keiji, "Shindai Kahoku no nōgyō keiei to shakai kōzō," *Shirin*, 64, No. 4 (July 1981), pp. 66–93; Kataoka Shibako, "Minmatsu Shinsho no Kahoku ni okeru nōka keiei," *Shakai keizai shigaku*, 25, Nos. 2–3 (June 1959), pp. 77–100; and recently and extensively, Kusano Yasushi, *Chūgoku no jinushi keizai-bunshūsei*.

356 Only in the core areas of Shantung and Honan, and rarely in Ho-pei, did there exist a crop rotation system of millet-winter wheat-beans-fallow, i.e., three crops in two years.

used for loans to the many peasants in the area with very small holdings, who could consequently come to be in a rather extreme state of servility.³⁵⁷

In addition to large landlords and peasants with very small farms who farmed some land of their own while doubling as hired laborers or sharecroppers, rich tenants who often possessed one team of animals and rented additional land to make the best use of them were also to be found in this agricultural regime.³⁵⁸

In the North, during the Ming there was an increase in labor-intensive practices in the most fertile areas as well. The cultivation of commercialized products was also (and especially) taken up by the peasants with little land and laborers without animals.³⁵⁹ Farming small amounts of land became economically feasible, and the importance of fodder and animals decreased, a state of affairs that is reflected in the rise of wages at the end of the Ming. The situation in the North contrasted with the situation in southern China, since peasants in the North became increasingly unwilling to hire themselves out as laborers. Smaller rented farms spread slowly and appeared much later in the North than in the South.³⁶⁰

Chiang-nan: Su-chou

It is generally agreed that the Chiang-nan region (consisting of southern Kiangsu, northern Chekiang, and some adjacent regions of Anhwei) was the most economically advanced region of China. Rice productivity was high-

357 Examples include Shang-ch'iu, seat of Kuei-te prefecture, and Ku-shih. See Kataoka, "Kahoku ni okeru nōka keiei." However, such peasants possessed contracts; and "slaves," even in the Chinese sense of the word, were rare because the amount of labor needed was much better controlled by hiring short-term laborers: Kataoka, "Kahoku ni okeru nōka keiei," pp. 77–78, n. 1, arguing against Oyama. Hired labor was therefore much more prevalent in the North than in the more commercialized South: p. 82.

358 Perhaps, as Kataoka suggests, they were favored by the tax system, which, as we saw in the North, included a very progressive household levy according to property, including animals and carts used for transport. Logically, I would expect this to be the case only after the single-whip reforms, which met with such resistance in the North precisely because of the importance of non-land factors. I suspect that tenancy became much more profitable only in the late sixteenth-century, because it enabled the cultivator to avoid the taxes now more directly linked with pure land ownership.

359 Larger landlords sometimes did take up cotton growing as well. Chang Lü-hsiang mentions one in Nan-yang, Honan, with 1,000 *mu* planted with cotton: Kataoka, "Kahoku ni okeru nōka keiei," p. 89, n. 16.

360 The intensification process is described by Adachi, "Kahoku no nōgyō keiei." The term tenancy, as used here, refers to a status in which land is leased for a varying or fixed amount of the harvest produce, with management being the responsibility of the tenant household. In the North, until late Ming times, share-cropping, which lies somewhere between pure wage labor and tenancy, was far more prevalent. Recently, Kusano, in his *Chūgoku no jinushi keizai-bunshūsei* of 1985, has impressively, but not altogether convincingly argued that the Chinese terms *tsu* (to rent) and *tien* (to culte), nowadays used interchangeably, or in conjunction to denote tenancy and rents, should be distinguished in the sense that only the former involves rents and the leasing of land, while the latter involves sharecropping where supervision is still mainly done by the landlord.

est there, and rice was part of the produce marketed. Cash transactions were more frequent,³⁶¹ and the urban population was more numerous, resulting in a higher demand for food crops and other products. More artisans producing more nonagricultural goods worked there. The question of whether China could develop its own rich farmers using inputs of labor and capital in a capitalistic way is therefore most often thought of as a question to which this locale is best able to provide an answer.³⁶²

There have been some investigations into average farm sizes during the late imperial period and the early twentieth century.³⁶³ It is believed that the trend in farm sizes will reflect the optimum size for a particular agricultural regime and hence can tell us whether the large farms of wealthy landlords, which were larger than farms cultivable by one single household, were indeed economically more profitable than the farms of small-scale peasant cultivators. In the North and in Szechwan the curve denoting the relationship between the size of a farm and the percentage of households in a given locale that cultivated a farm of that size is inversely proportional: that is, most households cultivated small farms, a moderate number cultivated moderate sized farms, and only a few cultivated large farms. However, viewed in terms of the total area under cultivation, most cultivated land belonged to medium and large farms, reflecting the agricultural tradition previously outlined. In more commercialized, intensively cultivated areas, there were even fewer larger farms.

In most of the South, including large parts of Chiang-nan and some parts of Shantung, very small farms were prominent. Most of the land was carved up into plots and farms so small they certainly could not have supported a household: most people must have had to rely on side occupations to eke out a living. There is a clear drop in the number of farms larger than 5 to 10 *mu*, which would seem to imply that larger farms were unprofitable in that region.

However, in the most progressive agricultural areas,³⁶⁴ there was a tendency for both the smallest and largest farms to disappear and to be replaced by middle-sized farms. In principle, therefore, there seems not to have been

361 It is said that all transactions above 1 picul of rice or 1 bolt of cloth involved silver; see Terada, "Mindai Soshū heiya no nōka."

362 Of course, commercialization could be more advanced in some specialized mountain areas, or in relatively agriculturally deprived areas such as Fukien, and wage labor was more prominent in Northern China; but these were exceptional situations not directly related to overall agricultural productivity and are therefore peripheral to the problem.

363 See Adachi Keiji, "Shindai Soshū-fu ka ni okeru jinushiteki tochi shoyū no tenkai," pp. 24–56; the basic research pertains to the 1920s and is then projected backwards using additional data.

364 Excluding the areas near the city where nonagricultural production was simply more profitable and where, therefore, the average size of agricultural landholdings did not necessarily reflect the possibilities of agriculture itself.

any agricultural barriers to the development of a rural middle class. To answer the question of whether this lack of barriers allowed for the development of a middle class from an historical rather than theoretical perspective we have to investigate the data more carefully.³⁶⁵

We should start with the situation in the early Ming. After Chu Yüan-chang had confiscated the lands of the largest landowners, we should expect the largest number of farms to be small, self-managed ones. As noted above, on good lowland soil one couple could farm 25 to 30 *mu*. Farm size decreased to 5 *mu* on bad highland soil and soil that required more labor. The optimum size of a farm, according to the *T'ien-kung k'ai-wu* (*The creations of nature and man*)³⁶⁶ was 10 *mu* for a couple possessing an ox, and 5 *mu* for a couple without one. If, as the administrative community (*li-chia*) system suggests, tenancy was not as widespread in the early Ming as it later became, we could use some of the 1370 figures on tax distribution for Su-chou prefecture to determine farm size (see Figure 9.4). These tax figures imply that more than 500 households owned between 200 and 7,800 *mu*; in view of the total far larger number of taxable households that must have existed in the area under consideration, these figures may be considered as further evidence for the relative scarcity of large landholdings, even if a very few landlords were indeed a dominating presence.

There are too many references to increased tenancy rates, to peasant debts, to the practice of false registration (*kuei-chi*), and to the existence of absentee landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*) to dismiss the possibility that tenancy became widespread. We should acknowledge that the information we have for increased class polarization in landownership from literary references is overwhelming.³⁶⁷

Even so, the average size of a landholding was never very large, and the largest landowners did not own a great amount of land: in the late sixteenth century, the amount of land owned by those who were assessed at the highest corvée category (the *pu-chieh*) was only 2,000 to 2,500 *mu*; the average landlord owned much less land than that. According to Chang Lü-hsiang, only one

365 On the above, see Adachi Keiji, "Shin-Minkokuki ni okeru nōgyō keiei no hatten – Chōkō kar-yūiki no baai," pp. 255–88.

366 For a translation, see Sung Ying-hsing, *T'ien-kung k'ai-wu: Chinese technology in the seventeenth century*, trans. E-tu Zen Sun and Shiou-chuan Sun (University Park, 1966). The original Chinese work was first published in 1637.

367 Yet it is also said that many people left agriculture completely. For 1550, a figure of 60 to 70 percent is mentioned, which is almost surely an exaggeration. See Terada, "Mindai Soshū heiya no nōka." This should have made conditions better for those remaining.

percent of all households owned more than 40 *mu*.³⁶⁸ This situation obtained at a time when in his relatively backward region ten *mu* was said to be barely sufficient to provide for the subsistence of a family; such families had to hire out some members as short-term laborers, go into debt, or pursue side occupations to eke out a living.³⁶⁹ The late Ming-early Ch'ing fish-scale registers (*yü-lin-ts'e*)³⁷⁰ generally confirm the situation we have just described.

With respect to farm size, a fish-scale register from Wu-hsien county (which had its seat in Su-chou)³⁷¹ shows a preponderance of very small farms that were rather compact. Even when they consisted of several plots, the plots did not lie farther than 500 to 600 meters apart. Tenants must have been able to rent plots from several different landowners to create such relatively compact farms. There were many "semi-proletarians" who could not have been able to sustain themselves solely by farming: 60 percent of those farming less than 5 *mu* farmed less than 2.5 *mu*.³⁷² Yet rich peasants farming 20 to 50 *mu* were economically important: although they comprised only 9.5 percent of the total number of farming households, they cultivated 30 to 40 percent of the total land.³⁷³

In contrast to data regarding farm sizes, data regarding landownership found in an early Ch'ing register from Ch'ang-chou presents another picture.³⁷⁴ It shows that landlord households possessed 10 to 25 *mu*, that very few owned more than 30; and that only one owned more than 100 *mu*.³⁷⁵ Of

368 This was still more than enough to be classified as a landlord, because, on average, no more than ten *mu* could be worked by a single household. Even well-known members of the gentry like Kuei Yu-kuang (1507–71), Chang Lü-hsiang (1611–74), and Tung Ssu-pai (a member of the Hanlin Academy), owned only 20 to 40 *mu*. For Kuei, see DMB, pp. 759–61; for Chang, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 45–46. Chang Lü-hsiang is sometimes read as Chang Li-hsiang. See Terada, "Mindai Soshū heiya no nōka."

369 See Terada, "Mindai Soshū heiya no nōka."

370 As investigated by Tsurumi Naohiro and Adachi Keiji. See Tsurumi Naohiro, "Gyorinsatsu o tazunete;" his "Kōki jūgonen jōryō no Chōshūken gyorinsatsu;" his "Shinsho, Soshūfu no gyorinsatsu;" his "Soshūfu Chōshūken gyorin tosatsu no dendo tōkeiteki kōsatsu;" and his "Futatabi." See Adachi Keiji, "Shin-Minkokuki ni okeru nōgyō keiei;" and his "Shindai Soshū-fu." Chao Kang also mentions some Ming and Ch'ing *yü-lin-ts'e* in his book, but his analysis is rough and the provenance of his registers is not well investigated. See Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo t'u-ti chih-tu shih*, ch. 5.

371 Dating from 1676 and largely, but not completely, traceable to the Chang Chü-cheng survey. This particular register shows that 96.5 to 100 percent of the area cultivated in the twentieth century was already accounted for, so underregistration was extremely slight.

372 People who owned no land at all are not accounted for in the fish-scale registers. Indeed, even fish-scale registers showing both tenants and owners, which would be necessary for such calculations as those made in this case, are rather rare. As said before, all these early Ch'ing registers clearly go back to the situation prevailing during the Chang Chü-cheng surveys.

373 Adachi, "Shin-Minkokuki ni okeru nōgyō keiei."

374 Register 25B/19—Regular, also from 1676.

375 The tax gradations mentioned in this register show that we may very well use this document for the late Ming situation: the amounts and categories are equal to those of 1620, with some minor reclassifications noted as such.

all landowning households accounted for in this register, 70 percent possessed less than 5 *mu* of land, and many households owning only 10 to 20 *mu* leased out some of their land. Managerial landlords were rare. The Wu-hsien register indicates that the largest landlords were nonetheless important: the top 3 percent of all households owned one third of all the land.³⁷⁶

From another register,³⁷⁷ we also learn that in the various polders, 68 percent to 96 percent of the land was leased out, figures which substantially confirm the literary references. The top 2.6 percent of the households owned 37.5 percent of the land. Landlords typically managed 10 to 20 *mu* themselves and certainly had to lease out land if they owned more than 30 *mu*. Four percent of the households owned over 100 *mu*, and just over half of the households owned less than 5 *mu*. The socio-economic distribution was as shown in Figure 9.6; the numbers indicate the number of households in a certain category. Note that there were even two households who belonged to all three socio-economic groups; that is, they cultivated some part of their land themselves and therefore are classified as "owner-cultivators," leased out some other part and therefore are also classified as "landlords," and rented land from other households as well, and therefore also belong to the category of "tenants." This shows considerable, if not total fluidity among the socio-economic groups.

The same material³⁷⁸ indicates that the owner-cultivators had less and poorer land than tenants. Apparently, those who owned some land and rented more were better off than those who just farmed their own plots.³⁷⁹ More than 53 percent of the tenants rented land from more than one landlord, which indicates that the landlord-tenant relationship cannot have been a strict "feudal" relation of personal dependence. Circumstances similar to these are described in yet another register,³⁸⁰ in which we can see the situation that obtained after the category of official land, which hitherto had accounted for more than 95 percent of the land, was abolished. Only 10 landlords farmed more than 20 *mu*, but so did nine tenants. Yet the two greatest landlords together owned more than 20 percent of the land. Here as well, those peasants with small farms who rented some land in addition to their own were better

376 Tsurumi, "Kōki jūgonen jōryō no Chōshūken gyorinsatsu," and Tsurumi, "Shinsho, Soshūfu no gyorinsatsu."

377 Ch'ang-chou Register 21B/8.

378 See Tsurumi, "Soshūfu Chōshūken gyorin tosatsu no dendo tōkeiteki kōsatsu."

379 See also above; similar situations have been reported for Republican China by Fukutake, *Chūgoku nōson shakai no kōzō*. This came about because a peasant who could, in times of surplus labor, expand his own holding to an optimum size by renting land was better off financially than someone who could not do so. The social and even economic position of a tenant, as such, seems not to have made any difference in this regard. See Chao and Ch'en, *Chung-kuo t'u-ti chih-tu shih*, p. 417.

380 Register 24/20.

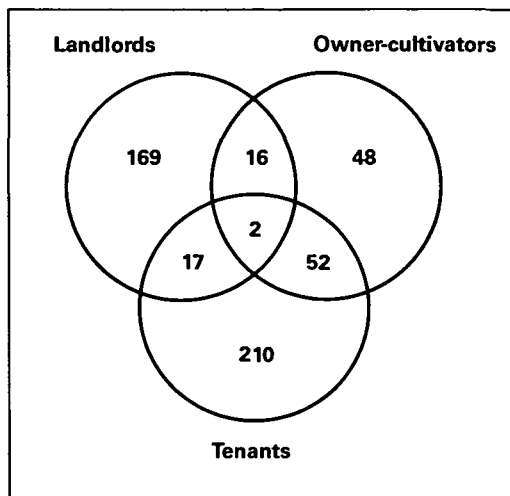


Fig. 9.6. Socio-economic groups in late Ming Ch'ang-chou

off than those who only worked their own land (see Figure 9.7).³⁸¹ Tenancy increased and farms were smaller nearer to the city; and the three socio-economic groups are more distinct one from another than is the case in Figure 9.6.

In sum, according to these fish-scale registers, a large percentage of the cultivated land was owned by a small percentage of the population, but the actual management of the land was dispersed widely among people who owned little or no land of their own.

Chiang-nan: Hui-chou

Perhaps the area for which we possess most information is the prefecture of Hui-chou in present-day Anhwei Province. In addition to some fish-scale registers dating from the Chang Chü-cheng survey, the land deed books of several prominent families are also extant. Unfortunately, the very special position Hui-chou occupied in Ming and Ch'ing China, the prominence of its merchants, and the exceptional existence of servile tenants there make it difficult to generalize about China as a whole from the material describing conditions in this prefecture. Nevertheless, we should consider some of the most

³⁸¹ Tsurumi, "Futatabi." Tsurumi reports elsewhere that in other, as yet unanalyzed registers, there were more owner-cultivators: Tsurumi, "Gyorinsatsu o tazunete," p. 61.

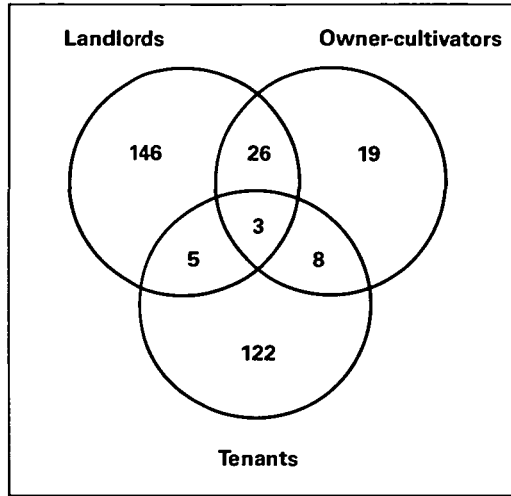


Fig. 9-7. Socio-economic groups in late Ming Ch'ang-chou II

salient details that have recently come to light in the ever increasing stream of studies on the Hui-chou socio-economic regime.

In 1384, the largest landlord in She-hsien paid over 600 *tan* of rice in taxes; this would indicate that his landholdings comprised 1,200 *mu*.³⁸² Elsewhere in the prefecture, in this and other periods, there were few landlords who owned more than 1,000 *mu*. In Hsiu-ning, at one time in the late sixteenth century the largest landholder in the county owned 2,400 *mu*.³⁸³

The size of the average land transaction indicates that few landlords had large holdings.³⁸⁴ The trend, however, was toward an increase in the average size of a landlord's holdings, and more transactions were conducted between landlords.³⁸⁵ Landlords' increasing disengagement from the actual

³⁸² Unless the tax was lighter than usual and the amount of land inferred above understated, the 360 *tien-p'u* (servile tenants) he controlled may not all have been used for agricultural purposes. See P'eng Ch'ao, "Hsiu-ning 'Ch'eng-shih chu-ch'an-pu' p'ou-hsi," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih yen-chiu* 1983/4, pp. 55-66.

³⁸³ Yeh, *Ming-Ch'ing Hui-chou nung-ts'un she-hui*.

³⁸⁴ From 1393 to 1515, the plots of land purchased from owner-cultivators by the Wang lineage were, in most cases, 2 *mu* or less; by 1522 only 65 *mu* was amassed that way, yet the lineage was certainly not unimportant. See Liu Sen, "Lüeh lun Ming-tai Hui-chou ti t'u-ti chan-yu hsing-t'ai," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-shi shih yen-chiu*, 2 (1986), pp. 37-43, who, using old rhetoric, still calls this "great landlord ownership." The Hung in Hsiu-ning also very slowly increased their landholdings: from 1390 to 1604 only 80 *mu* paddy land, 5 *mu* dry land, and 104 *mu* mountain land was amassed. See Yeh, *Ming-Ch'ing Hui-chou nung-ts'un she-hui*.

³⁸⁵ Without stating exactly what he considered to be the limits of "large" and "small" transactions, P'eng Ch'ao, "Hsiu-ning," measured the increase in percentage of large transactions from 23 percent in the Chia-ching period (1522-66) to 90 percent in the T'ien-ch'i period (1621-27).

management of the land itself can be seen in the fact that the exact location of a plot was mentioned less and less often in records of tenancy; only the amount of rent and the name of the tenant were recorded.³⁸⁶

Until the early sixteenth century, most transactions used paper money, grain, or cotton cloth as the medium of exchange; after the late fifteenth century, silver gradually supplanted earlier mediums of exchange.³⁸⁷

One reason why the concentration of land into the hands of fewer owners moved rather slowly was the continuation, in Hui-chou at least, of the practice of selling land only to others within one's lineage whenever possible. This practice not only implied strong lineage solidarity, but also considerable economic disparity among the members of a given lineage.³⁸⁸ Land owned by temples or by lineages as corporate entities also increased. Donating land to temples or registering it as land owed by a lineage was a strategy used to prevent the dispersal of land by sale or inheritance; legally and customarily, land so donated or registered could not be sold.³⁸⁹ In mountainous areas, risk-sharing by landlords and tenants or share-cropping was still practiced, although fixed rents increasingly became the norm. These, however, were never paid in full.³⁹⁰

Chiang-nan: Tung-hsiang

No account of Chiang-nan would be complete without mentioning the *Shen-shih Nung-shu* (*The manual of agriculture by Master Shen*), together with its addenda by Chang Lü-hsiang, the *Pu Nung-shu* (*Addenda to the manual of agriculture*).³⁹¹ Chang and his friends were small, part-time managerial landlords, but most landowners were unable to survive as managerial landlords. It is clear that

386 Liu Sen, "Lüeh lun Ming-tai Hui-chou."

387 Liu Sen, "Lüeh lun Ming-tai Hui-chou." There was still a shortage of silver; this is evidenced by the fact that jewelry was regularly accepted as payment. See P'eng Ch'ao, "Hsiu-ning."

388 Of the 103 contracts in the Hung contract books, 61 percent of the transactions was between lineage members, 3 percent was repurchased by the original owners, and 8 percent was bought by neighbors, the remainder being unknown.

389 Locally, sometimes (but the examples are rather late) lineage land could comprise more than 70 percent in a village's cultivated land. See Yeh, *Ming-Ch'ing Hui-chou nung-t'ai shen-hui*.

390 The Hu in She-hsien regularly received only 80 to 90 percent of the rent in kind; the income from money rents was also only 90 percent, but much more regular. See Chang Yu-i, "Shih-ch'i shih-chi ch'ien-ch'i Hui-chou tsu-t'ien kuan-hsi ti i ko wei-kuan yen-chiu - She-hsien Hu-hsing 'Huai Hsin-kung tsu-pu' p'ou-hsi," *Chung-kuo she-hui k'o-o-hsueh-yüan ching-chi yen-chiu-so chi-k'e'an*, 5 (1983), pp. 33-59, on p. 52.

391 Chang wrote this book, which differs in its practical, non-normative approach from all official compilations, in 1658 on the basis of the *Nung-shu* of a certain Mr. Shen about whom not much is known except that he might have been Chang's relative. The first part is somewhat more directly linked to day-to-day farming, while in the second, Chang's part, somewhat more systematization has taken place. See Furushima Kazuo, "Ho Nōsho no seiritsu to sono chiban," *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjō kiryō*, 3 (1952) rpt. in his *Chūgoku kindai shakaishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1982), pp. 334-67; see also his "Min-matsu Chōkō deruta ni okeru jinushi keiei - Shin-shi nōsho no ichi," *Rekishigaku kenkyū* 148 ([1950]), rpt. in his *Chūgoku kindai shakaishi kenkyū*, pp. 307-33.

tenancy had become much more profitable.³⁹² In the purchase of fertilizer (the whole work is obsessed with fertilizer, which was to be obtained by raising animals on the farm itself), some have seen the beginnings of capitalist farming in the strict sense of the term (fertilizer increases production and is therefore capital).³⁹³

Between the two printings of the book, prices had increased while wages had decreased. Prices and wages were updated in the second printing.³⁹⁴ Since there are also indications that wages had increased somewhat in the late sixteenth century, this information supports the socio-political tendencies outlined above: the increase in the supply of hired labor had come about in part owing to the reluctance of some cultivators to own their own land, because the corvée labor requirements on landowners were too onerous. After the sixteenth-century reforms, this situation apparently was ameliorated, and the labor supply consequently decreased, a situation that temporarily increased wages until longer term population trends lowered them again.³⁹⁵

Chang, as a managerial landlord, was neither a large landlord nor a very successful one; he finally failed in his agricultural endeavors. He was not completely commercialized: the food he grew was for his own use, and the risky silk market alone provided him some profit as long as hired laborers were to be found. Whatever profit Chang made before he failed was spent on books.

Kiangsi

For convenience, we can divide Kiangsi into two main areas. The first, the fertile plains around the P'o-yang lake and along the lower Kan river, had already developed into a grain exporting region before Ming times. The southern, mountainous regions of Kiangsi form the second area: in early

392 See, in addition to the studies of Furushima mentioned in the preceding note, Ch'en Heng-li (assisted by Wang Ta), *Pu Nung-shu yen-chiu* (Pei-ching, 1958); and Tanaka Masatoshi, "Ho Nōsho o meguru shokenkyū (1)–Minmatsu Shinsho tochi seidoshi kenkyū no dōkō," *Tōyō gakuhō*, 43, No. 1 (June 1960), pp. 110–16.

393 Quantification of Chang's data has been attempted, but it is difficult and several conflicting interpretations are possible: Chang himself provides a very detailed account in some cases, but he also neglects to quantify some major expenses as well as all money spent on community works, which he, as a good Confucian, tried to organize. See Adachi Keiji, "Minmatsu Shinsho no ichi nōgyō keiei – 'Shinshi nōsho' no sai hyōka," *Shirin*, 61, No. 1 (January 1978), pp. 40–69, and for a critique, see Iwama Kazuo, "Minmatsu Shinsho ni okeru Chōkō deruta no 'jisakunō' keiei – nōshi Chō Rishō ni okeru jikōshugi," *Tochi seido shigaku*, 96 (July 1982), pp. 52–68.

394 See Furushima, "Ho Nōsho no seiritsu," p. 353.

395 See also Ch'en Heng-li, *Pu Nung-shu yen-chiu*. The going wage was some 13 *taels* (including 5.5 *tan* rice for food), which seems to have been a low but adequate annual income in late Ming times.

Ming times these areas were still largely undeveloped and more or less self-contained.³⁹⁶

These two areas not only entered the Ming period in different ways, they also developed differently thereafter. The northern part of Kiangsi never stopped exporting grain to the Chiang-nan area, but it increasingly suffered from overpopulation, despite a vigorous development of irrigation works and polders.³⁹⁷ From the very early Ming, northern Kiangsi was characterized by emigration, both to other provinces and to other areas within Kiangsi.

The internal movement was to the southern areas along the Yangtze tributaries, where opportunities for rice cultivation attracted many settlers. Kan-chou, close to the Kwangtung border, but linked through the Kan river with the P'o-yang Lake and hence, Chiang-nan, became a net exporter of rice.

By far the largest wave of migration from Kiangsi flowed into Hu-kuang and was already well under way in the early fifteenth century. Hu-kuang was attractive in the same way that southern Kiangsi was, but on a much larger scale. Immigrants were outside the tax system set in place during the beginning of the dynasty and it was therefore relatively easy for a hard-working small farmer to establish himself. This took place to the detriment of the local population already incorporated into the *li-chia* structure and it is not surprising that such immigration was a constant source of strife.³⁹⁸ This wave of emigration is not only evident from Kiangsi records, but also in Hu-kuang itself. Investigation after investigation reveals that the greatest majority of immigrant Hu-pei and Hu-nan lineages originated in Kiangsi and, moreover, that most immigrants arrived during the Ming.³⁹⁹

The mountains of Kiangsi accounted for much economic development unrelated to food production. Ching-te-chen, world-famous for its porcelain, might be an exception in the sense that originally, ever since the Ching-te period (1004–07) of the Sung dynasty (hence its name), its production had been under the control of and for the use of the state. Even there, however, during the second half of the Ming, a large percentage of the kilns engaged in cera-

396 See O Kūm-sōng, *Chungguk künse sahoe kyōngjesa yōn'gu* – *Myōng-dae sinsach'ūng ūi hyōngsōng kwa sahoe kyōngjesōk yōkeha* (Sōultae tongyang sahak yōn'gu ch'ongsō, 1986). This book has an English summary on pp. 293–312 and is completely translated into Japanese by Watari Masahiro as *Mindai shakai keizaishi kenkyū – shinsishō no keisei to sono shakai keizaiteki yakuwari* (Tokyo, 1990).

397 See Table 4 on pp. 203–5 of “Ming-tai Chiang-hsi nung-ts'un ti she-hui pien-hua yü shen-shih” In: Chung-yang yen-chiu yüan ed., *Chung-yang yen-chiu yüan ti erh-chieh kuo-chi Han-hsiueh hui-i lun-wen-chi* (Dec. 29–31, 1986 – *Ch'ing-chu Chung-yang yen-chiu yüan ch'ing liu-shih chou-nien*): *Ming-Ch'ing yü chin-tai shih tsu* (Taipei, 1989), Vol. 1, pp. 189–211.

398 See, for example, O, “Ming-tai Chiang-hsi,” p. 196.

399 See, for example, Ts'ao Shu-chi, “Hu-nan jen yu-lai k'ao,” *Li-shih ti li*, 9 (Oct. 1990), pp. 114–29; table 1, p. 115 for four counties in Hu-pei, and tables 7 (p. 123) and 9 (p. 125) for Hu-nan. The Ch'ing period, apparently, saw much less migration. See also Fu I-ling, “Ming-tai Chiang-hsi ti kung-shang-yeh jen-k'ou chi ch'i i-tung,” pp. 1–7.

mics production were private; according to one estimate, production in the late sixteenth century was 36 million pieces worth a total value of 1.8 million *taels* of silver.⁴⁰⁰

While Ching-te-chen did not really influence its immediate rural hinterland (which remained rather uncommercialized except for the firewood trade for the kilns),⁴⁰¹ elsewhere there was more general development. Some mountainous areas sustained a quite varied range of products and handicrafts including bamboo, medicinal herbs, tea, indigo and even mining products. Places such as Ho-k'ou (or Yen-shan) were typical of late Ming developments; they developed as river entrepôts to which the products of mountainous areas were shipped. It was such products as these that linked Kiangsi with the national, and in the case of Ching-te-chen, international markets.⁴⁰²

Hu-kuang

Hu-kuang was a rather enigmatic region in Ming times. Some authors with impressive material have argued that the region had a landlord-dominated export economy, while the *Five mixed platters* (*Wu-tsa-tsu*), for example, stated that “differences between rich and poor are not very great.”⁴⁰³ These two views can be reconciled if the special conditions of Hu-kuang are taken into consideration. Originally a rather underpopulated region, toward the middle of the fifteenth century, Hu-kuang developed such a flourishing rice export economy that the proverb “if Hu-kuang has a good harvest, the world has sufficiency,” an imitation of an earlier proverb pertaining to Chiang-nan, was coined.⁴⁰⁴ As a result, there was a great discrepancy between official tax records (which had been fixed early in the dynasty) and reality with regard to who owned the land. This discrepancy opened the door to upward mobility for immigrants and tenants. When the province became

400 See Hsiao Fang, “Lun Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch'i Chiang-hsi ssu ta kung-shang shih-chen ti fa-chan chi ch'i li-shih chü -hsien,” *Chiang-hsi ching-shi shih lun-ts'ung*, 1 (May 1987), pp. 139–75, p. 141.

401 See Liang Sen-t'ai, “Ming-Ch'ing shih-ch'i Fu-liang ti nung-lin shang-p'in,” *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih yen-chiu*, 1 (1988), pp. 28–38, esp. pp. 36–7.

402 See for these and other cities, Hsiao Fang, “Chiang-hsi ssu ta kung-shang shih-chen.”

403 Shigeta, “Shinsho ni okeru Konan beishijō,” *versus* Yasuno Shōzō, “Minmatsu Shinsho Yōsukō chūryū iki no daitochi shōyū ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu – Kohoku Kanshenken Shōgyōsai no baai o chūshin to shite,” *Tōyō gakuhō*, 44, No. 3 (December 1961), pp. 61–88, n. 4. Yasuno does not believe in landlord markets. Nor does Rawski, *Agricultural change*.

404 First thought to date from the late Ming period, Iwami first pushed its origin back to the early sixteenth century, and Terada in 1979 found a reference from the T'ien-shun (1457–64) period. See Iwami Hiroshi, “Kokō juku tenka soku,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 20, No. 4 (March 1962), p. 175, and Terada Takanobu, “Kokō juku tenka soku,” *Bunka*, 43, Nos. 1–2 (September 1979), p. 87. See also Fujii Hiroshi, “Hsin-an shang-jen ti yen-chiu' Chung-i-pen hsü-yen,” *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih yen-chiu*, 3 (1984), pp. 51–54 in an introduction to the Chinese translation of his “Shin'an shōnin no kenkyū.”

more fully developed, landlords were in a better position to supply the export market.⁴⁰⁵

The development of Hu-kuang as a rice producing area was based on an increase in the area of cultivated land; double-cropping was only very marginally possible around the Tung-t'ing Lake, while two crops could be grown interspersed in Li-ling, Yü-hsien, and An-jen counties.⁴⁰⁶ Large irrigation schemes had started around 1400 in Hu-pei under conditions very different from Chiang-nan and Hu-nan: long dikes requiring much coordination between many counties were necessary to ensure safety on the Hu-pei plain around present-day Wu-han. Drainage was very important in this plain, where the Yangtze flows slowly and deposits a great amount of silt. In the middle of the sixteenth century, a major crisis in the system occurred when too many private polders were built, too many drainage areas were occupied, and many necessary outlets were closed, in order to ensure good *feng-shui* (geomantic) fortune for the Chia-ching emperor's parents' mausoleum in An-lu county.⁴⁰⁷ This caused flooding in the lower areas and, after 1567, immigration slowed down or stopped. Some irrigation projects were still undertaken, but the financial problems of the government gradually made these inefficient: Hu-pei was in bad shape at the end of the Ming.⁴⁰⁸

In Hu-nan, irrigation projects were more local affairs and were especially concentrated around the Tung-t'ing Lake. A small number of the people who were locally influential (often degree holders) increased their influence by taking care of the irrigation works and by functioning as dike-masters or polder-masters,⁴⁰⁹ and many new polders were reclaimed under gentry leadership.⁴¹⁰

405 In the early Ch'ing, this ultimately led to clashes between landlords and tenants when landlords tried to recover more of the harvest by requesting deposits and to export more rice than the regional economy as a whole could afford to lose. See Shigeta, "Shinsho ni okeru Konan beishijō," and Wong, R. Bin, "Food riots in the Qing dynasty," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 41, No. 4 (August 1982), pp. 767–88.

406 Yasuno, "Minmatsu Shinsho Yōsukō chūryū iki no daitochi shoyū."

407 See Pierre-Étienne Will, "State intervention in the administration of a hydraulic infrastructure: the example of Hubei province in late Imperial times" In *The scope of state power in China*, ed. S. Schram (London and Hong Kong, 1985), pp. 295–347.

408 I follow here Pierre-Étienne Will, "Un cycle hydraulique en Chine: la province du Hubei du XVI^e au XIX^e siècles," *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême-orient*, 68 (1980), pp. 261–87. It should be mentioned though, that the city of Han-k'ou had in the meantime taken great advantage of the increasing importance of its hinterland; see Taniguchi Kikuo, "Kankō-chin no seiritsu ni tsuite." In *Tō-Sō jidai no gyōsei-keizai chizu no sakusei* (*Kenkyū seika hōkokusho*), ed. Nunome Chōfū (Osaka, 1981), pp. 111–19.

409 *T'ang-chang* (dike chief), *pa-chang* (embankment chief), and *yüan-chang* (polder chief), *yüan* being the term in Hu-nan for the small, round polders.

410 The number rose in Hua-jung county from forty-eight to 100 (until the late Chia-ching period, in the second half of the sixteenth century), and in Pa-ling county (seat of Yüeh-chou prefecture) from twenty to fifty during the fifteenth century.

From the beginning of the sixteenth century, therefore, there was a clear increase in the polarization of the population between the richer and the poorer classes: tenancy and poverty increased among the original taxpaying population and, through the control of irrigation works, landlords' control of tenants grew stronger.⁴¹¹ Yet there was also a large migration from the Yangtze provinces, especially Kiangsi, and these migrants were not under any tax or corvée obligations. Often, landlords employed these migrants to reclaim new land, and a kind of frontier situation could obtain that had different results in different parts of the region. Where official control was originally weak and there were few possibilities of exporting produce because of the lack of water transport, landlords sometimes succeeded in imposing very servile conditions on their tenants by using armed gangs. This practice was especially prevalent in the western and southern regions, where minorities were still numerous and where civil society was highly militarized.

Along the riverways, however, the possibilities of exporting produce could be used by landlords and immigrants alike. Despite these opportunities, the original peasants with small landholdings frequently complained that, "the outsiders are not on the government tax rolls, and moreover, [their] lake land does not pay taxes."⁴¹² As a result, sentiment against immigrants from Kiangsi ran high.

The increased power of landlords coupled with the possibility that immigrant tenants could become landowners must have led to the situation mentioned in the *Wu-tsa-tsu* and elsewhere, in which the economic and social status and position of both rich and poor remained rather fluid. After the single-whip reforms and the rather successful Chang Chü-cheng survey in Hu-kuang, these conditions changed: economic and social status became less fluid. The trend in which landlords came to dominate the social landscape must have escalated, a circumstance that explains the impoverishment of tenants during the early Ch'ing.

411 See O Kūm-sōng, "Minmatsu Dōteiko shūhen no suiri kaihatsu to nōson shakai," trans. Yamane Yukio, *Chūgoku suirishi kenkyū*, 10 (October 1980), pp. 14–35; and O Kūm-sōng, "Minmatsu Dōteiko shūhen no kantei no hattatsu to sono rekishiteki igi," trans. Nakamura Tomoyuki, *Shibō*, 10 (April 1979), pp. 22–40.

412 In Hsiang-yin, for example, half of the original peasant landowners had fled their original abode or become tenants, while half of the immigrants had already become landowners. Ch'iu Chün (1420–95) already had wanted to include the latter on the Hu-kuang tax rolls, but these were in fact rarely updated. See his biography in *DMB*, pp. 249–52, and O, "Minmatsu Dōteiko shūhen no suiri kaihatsu." For Ch'iu Chün, see also Chu Hung-lam, "Ch'iu Chün (1421–95) and the *Ta-hsiueh yen-i pu*: statecraft thought in fifteenth-century China" (Diss., Princeton University, 1983).

Szechwan

Data for Szechwan during the Ming period are notoriously hard to locate, and few authors have attempted to examine the materials that do remain. Both the Mongol conquest and Chang Hsien-chung's occupation during the Ming-Ch'ing transition were devastating. The scarce material available⁴¹³ indicates that the Ming saw the continuation of a trend that had started during the late Sung period: transportation links by land with northern China were supplanted by transportation links by river with central and southern China. Eastern Szechwan increasingly became a part of China proper and less of the minority region it had been.⁴¹⁴ Agriculture along the upper Yangtze became more productive and, in the late Ming period, most prefectures became self-sufficient and some even achieved a surplus. In the sixteenth century, corn growing spread to unirrigated hilly areas.

In the Ming period, Szechwanese trade centers along the Yangtze (to which Sha-shih in Hu-kuang perhaps should be added, because a large contingent of Szechwan boats was present there), were mainly just transshipment centers and possessed little hinterland.

Little concerning social details is known. Szechwan must have been in a situation similar to that of Hu-kuang: new land was still available so that immigrants (initially from Hu-kuang, Kwangtung, and Fukien, and later, from Kiangsi, Shensi, and Kweichow) still had opportunities to build better lives for themselves. We cannot assume, however, that one of Szechwan's modern characteristics, namely, the dispersal of its rural population into small hamlets, or isolated farmsteads tenuously linked through marketing patterns rather than by a village community structure, was already the case during the Ming: this social pattern is more probably a post-Chang Hsien-chung development.

Fukien

Fukien presents a very interesting case. The overpopulation, the forced commercialization of small-scale producers, the overseas merchants' networks, and the money surplus, all of which resulted in multiple landownership and rent-resistance movements, has already been discussed. A dialogue continues over whether push factors or pull factors were more prominent in

413 I follow here Paul J. Smith, "Commerce, Agriculture, and Core Formation in the Upper Yangtze, 2 AD to 1948," *Late Imperial China* 9, No. 1 (June 1988), pp. 1-78, who has tried to cover Ming Szechwan by complementing extrapolations from Sung and Ch'ing times with some Ming material. I have changed the Sung names used by Smith into both Ming and current usage.

414 *Chin-shih* degree lists also suggest a similar movement, favoring the region around Ch'ung-ch'ing in addition to the old core region around Ch'eng-tu.

the commercialization of agriculture.⁴¹⁵ Population pressure was strong and was recognized by contemporaries, although in the inland county of Yung-ch'ün, for example, conditions were still good enough in 1526 to support the local population, in 1612 the gazetteer paints a bleak picture, despite improvements in fertilizer and the introduction of sweet potatoes.⁴¹⁶

Other crops were imported for planting, including, around 1500, a new strain of Annam rice that made double cropping possible. Peanuts were imported around 1600. Serious land shortages were, however, widely seen as the reason why many local people engaged in trade.⁴¹⁷ Cash crops still remained of secondary importance to those crops raised for direct consumption and barely offset the worsening land per person ratio. Conditions never improved beyond the level of a subsistence economy.⁴¹⁸ In fact, population pressure, and hence, higher food prices, caused sericulture and cotton production⁴¹⁹ in southern Fukien to be phased out during the seventeenth century.⁴²⁰ The only areas suitable for raising cash crops existed in the limited region around Ch'üan-chou and Chang-chou, with their links to large-scale trade, which characteristically, however, included the re-export of many non-indigenous items.⁴²¹

Much of the profit realized in the commercial growth in Fukien – profit which was, agriculturally speaking, parasitic, since it was based on overseas trade⁴²² (copper coins exported from Chang-chou to Japan) on products that were produced elsewhere (silk, cotton) and only rarely on raw material or commodities produced locally in Fukien – went to Chiang-nan, the excep-

415 See, for example, Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch'ing nung-ts'ün she-hui ching-chi* (Pei-ching, 1961), for the former and Rawski, *Agricultural change*, for the latter.

416 Sweet potatoes were introduced from Luzon and heavily promoted by Chin Hsüeh-tseng (*chin-shih* of 1568) for the poorer soils after a crop failure in 1594. See Ng, "Peasant society of South Fu-chien," p. 195.

417 In 1490, there were still no merchants to be seen in Lung-yen, Ch'ang-t'ai, Nan-ching or Chang-p'ing; but during the sixteenth century it was said that half of the population of Fukien had to live from activities outside their villages, and rice and silver became important links with the outside world. Also see Ng, "Peasant society of South Fu-chien."

418 Maeda Katsutarō, cited in Ng, "Peasant society of South Fu-chien;" cf. also Ng, *Trade and Society*.

419 Cotton, under a Malayan (originally Sanskrit) name of *kapas* or *kapok* (*chi-pei* or *chia-pu*) had been grown very early in Fukien, but was not very widespread. See Ng, "Peasant society of South Fu-chien," p. 211, and also Chou and Yu, *Fang-yen yü Chung-kuo wen-hua*, p. 237.

420 Chang Pin-tsun, "Maritime trade and local economy in late Ming Fukien." In *Development and decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th centuries*, Sinica Leidensia, 22, ed. E. B. Vermeer (Leiden, 1990), pp. 63–82, is also important. Chang sees an economic contraction in 1620 and attributes it to commodity supplies exceeding demand.

421 Ng, *Trade and society*; and Ng, "Peasant society of South Fu-chien."

422 Fukien had been dominant in overseas trade since 1450, especially after 1567 when Hai-ch'eng, also known as Yüeh-kang, was designated as an official port. Total import value in Fukien has been estimated at over 1 million *taels* annually around 1590, even excluding corruption. See Chang Pin-tsun [Chang Pin-ts'un], "Maritime trade: the case of sixteenth century Fuchien (Fu-chien)" (Diss., Princeton University, 1983); and Chang, "Maritime trade and local economy."

tion being investments in the shipbuilding, housing, and education industries in the cities where the merchants lived.

Yet many peasants with small landholdings and tenants participated in the trade network, and villages gained considerable income from outside sources.⁴²³ To forestall an increase in farms that were too small, lineages, already important for defense against the pirates, tried to defend themselves by establishing common property land, a kind of disguised rural land concentration. In Fukien, these lineages were often fictional, and common surnames were created out of the blue.⁴²⁴ Military garrisons⁴²⁵ and monasteries were other great landowners and were officially tax-exempt until they lost that privilege in 1564 — although by custom they may have kept that privilege much longer. These temple domains could range from a hundred to many hundreds of *mu*. An exaggerated account says that six-sevenths of Chang-chou county consisted of temple land. In part, temple ownership was only nominal, the temple functioning as a kind of *ta-tsu-chu* (upper landlord) for the real, middle level, landowners.⁴²⁶

The Pearl River delta

The Pearl River delta in Kwangtung had been developing rapidly since the beginning of the early sixteenth century; foreign trade began to affect the region's socio-economic development in the mid-sixteenth century. The number of markets rose from thirty-three in the Yung-lo period, to ninety-five in 1558, to 176 in 1602; the population of Canton (Kuang-chou) itself is said to have increased from 75,000 in the early Ming to 300,000 in 1562.⁴²⁷

Food productivity was high: seven to eight *tan* of rice a year per *mu* could be grown. Other cash products were sometimes even more profitable (sugarcane could bring in as much as 14 to 15 *taels* per *mu*) and, since the Chia-ching period, the area imported rice from Kweichow and Hu-kuang. A weaving industry developed in the fifteenth century that used imported silk and cotton from Kiangsu and Anhwei.⁴²⁸ The designation of Canton

423 For the resulting increase in absentee landownership, see the section on multiple landownership. In Fukien there was also a direct movement of rural landlords to the city, partly because life there was more attractive, partly because there was a great fear of pirates. See Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*, ch. 2, n. 23.

424 For this interpretation, see Ng, *Trade and society*, and Ng, "Peasant society of South Fu-chien," p. 200.

425 Following national guidelines, one soldier had been provided with 25 to 30 *mu*, here much more than was needed.

426 In other cases, temple domination was sometimes so strong in Fukien that some authors assert the ceremonial donations to temples were more burdensome than regular taxes. Ng, "Peasant society of South Fu-chien," p. 204.

427 Huang Ch'i-ch'en, "Ming-Ch'ing Chu-chiang san-chiao-chou shang-yeh yü shang-jen tzu-pen ti fa-chan," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih yen-chiu*, 3 (1984), pp. 37–50.

428 See Huang Ch'i-ch'en, "Ming Ch'ing Chu-chiang."

as an official seaport and the deteriorating land per person ratio ensured that the commercialization of agriculture did not lose momentum: tobacco was imported from Luzon and its cultivation spread in sixteenth century. Tea was intensively cultivated (two people were needed to cultivate 1 *mu*), while women increasingly became part of the labor force.⁴²⁹ An important technological breakthrough occurred with the realization that the complex of farms that cultivated fruit trees in conjunction with fish ponds in Nanhai county (seat in Kuang-chou) and the village of Chiu-chiang was even more profitable with mulberry trees.⁴³⁰ Like Fukien, the region also saw some export-driven economic development involving the iron factories in Fo-shan.

The Pearl River delta had many absentee landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*), so tenancy rates were high. Earlier frontier conditions had given rise to the existence of another type of multiple landownership in which rich tenants rented land from landlords in order to sub-lease to others.⁴³¹ Lineages were often important in the reclamation of land, and the heads of these lineages doubled as tax representatives of the government. This, together with the defense mechanism necessary against widespread banditry in the area allowed internally cohesive, strongly differentiated lineages in walled villages to dominate the landscape there.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LATE MING

The status of the "gentry"

One of the major characteristics of late Ming social and economic life was the increased influence of the so-called *hsiang-shen* or *shen-chin*. These terms are often translated as "gentry," although any notion that such persons were formal or functional equivalents of the English landed gentry should be abandoned at the outset. "Gentry" as used here is a translation for the terms *hsiang-shen*, *shen-shih* and their equivalents; and is used with the understanding that the investigation of the precise sense of these terms remains a major aspect of studies of the "gentry."

There have been several different approaches to the study of the gentry. An early approach concerned itself with whether the gentry was a closed or

429 See Yeh Hsien-en, "Lüeh lun Chu-chiang san-chiao-chou ti shang-yeh shang-yeh-hua," *Chung-kuo she-hui ching-chi-shih yen-chiu*, 2 (1986), pp. 16–29.

430 This explains the large amount of tax land classified as "pond" in this area (18 percent in one Lungshan county [*hsiang*] in 1581), and the higher taxes assessed on it.

431 *Pao-tien*, see Yeh, "Lüeh lun Chu-chiang."

open social group. Several authors⁴³² equated the gentry-elite with some or all of the categories of degree holders.⁴³³ It was found that most degree holders came from families that had not produced high degree holders in the paternal line for three generations prior to the current degree holder. Hence, they concluded that the gentry stratum was very open and that upward (and, concomitantly, downward) mobility was high.

If, in order to assess social mobility, we could limit ourselves to the civil service, for which the higher two degrees were a requirement, it might be sufficient to define as gentry those families that produced higher degree holders. However, it is quite possible that well-established families could maintain their social status and influence even when there were no such degree holders in their ranks. There were, in fact, very few higher degree holders in any given area; lower degrees and other social factors might have been sufficient for them to gain and maintain elite or gentry status. Generations without degree holders could easily be bridged and the family's status maintained by such factors as wealth, position in the community, or social benefactions. If we include in the definition of the gentry only degree holders, there would have been far too few "gentry" to be important on the local level; clearly, we need a more comprehensive definition to encompass the local leadership. In addition, defining the gentry in this way does not take into account the nature of social groups: for purposes of definition, other members of the same family, at least – perhaps even members of an entire lineage – should be seen as members of the same social stratum.

Subsequent studies of local communities indicate that the lower level elite had much less social mobility than the upper level elite. Local lineages could maintain their social prominence for centuries. Their prominence was measured in different ways, the production of degree holders was but one; however, owing to the increasing competition for resources, this was a method to which lineages increasingly resorted. Landholding was another strategy that was used to maintain social prominence, and often it was a prerequisite for producing degree holders, since education was expensive and presumed the availability of surplus income and leisure. Lineage building was yet another strategy, and we can safely assume that the increase in the organization of lineages was a response to increased competition for social prominence

432 Ho Ping-ti, *The ladder of success in Imperial China – aspects of social mobility, 1368–1911* (New York, 1962), and Chang Chung-li, *The Chinese gentry – studies in their role in nineteenth-century Chinese society* (Seattle, 1955), are the most prominent scholars in this debate.

433 Ho included only recipients of the provincial degree holders (*chü-jen*) and higher degrees in his definition of the elite. He called elite members "truly humble" if for three prior generations in the paternal line they had not produced any bachelor (*sheng-yüan*) before, a category which declined during the Ming from 46.7 percent to 19.2 percent of the total elite as defined by him.

similar to investment in education. If the social elite comprised the affluent and leisured segment of the population,⁴³⁴ the entire group of degree holders represented only a very small part of that elite. Prominence was maintained as well by manipulating marriage networks, by participation in prestigious projects, including the upkeep of Buddhist temples, the sponsorship of plays and theatricals, the maintenance of irrigation networks, and the underwriting of burial societies. Degree holders came from this larger group of the elite and as such were not an “impermanant, insecure upper class.”⁴³⁵ While it is clear that degree holders, because they were degree holders, received preferential treatment from the government in a number of ways, they only formed the top of what could be called the local social elite. Sometimes degree holders merged with that local elite, and sometimes, when their numbers were sufficient to do so, they separated themselves from it in order to form a distinct, countywide, supra-elite.

Degree holders as a socio-economic group

There are nonetheless good arguments for separating degree holders from this social elite at large for some purposes of analysis. The most important one is economic. From the very beginning of the dynasty, officials and all degree holders had been given not only ceremonial privileges, but also tangible benefits – in particular corvée exemptions – for they were considered to have labored already with their minds in the service of the emperor. In time these exemptions grew; with the amalgamation of corvée and taxes in kind and the subsequent conversion of these taxes into payments in silver, their exemptions came to include preferential status in respect of tax payments and payments assessed against their landholdings.⁴³⁶ The legal prerogatives degree holders enjoyed ensured that even when the tax in excess of the exemptions was not paid, not much could in fact be done to enforce payment. Rich and poor alike could commend their land to a degree holder or a retired official in order to avoid paying taxes, but they could not avoid submitting to the local gentry’s control. The rich could rely on their own social power,

434 A definition proposed by Fei Hsiao-t’ung, “Peasantry and gentry: an interpretation of Chinese social structure and its changes,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 52, No. 1 (July 1946), pp. 1–17; it included then one-fifth of the population.

435 This has been clearly demonstrated by Hilary J. Beattie, *Land and lineage in China – A study of T’ung-ch’eng county, An-hwei, in the Ming and Ch’ing dynasties* (Cambridge, 1979). As Keith Hazelton stated, the local elite had the “ability to produce occasionally upper gentry members as a means of periodically confirming and consolidating their local elite status;” Hazelton, “Lineages and local elites in Hui-chou,” p. 6.

436 The last form of exemption was considered illegal, although some argued to the contrary; it was a hotly debated issue at the time.

position, or friendship with a degree holder to have the degree holder accept the commendation of their land to him as a favor (in which case they were only socially indebted to them), but the poor, in order to commend their land, often had to become tenants or bondservants.⁴³⁷ Members of the gentry almost invariably became landlords,⁴³⁸ even though landholding was not a necessary precondition for becoming a member of the gentry. Privileges obtained even for degree holders who were poor and who could survive only by taking up secretarial or teaching positions, a situation that was bemoaned by the more sympathetic critics. Many other groups, such as the merchants, the literarily successful,⁴³⁹ the self-proclaimed moralists, the painters, the priests, and above all, the local rich, were often not socially inferior at all.⁴⁴⁰ Furthermore, many members of the gentry either originated as or were also merchants, investors, pawnbrokers and usurers.

Whatever their social position might have been, degree holders comprised a group in local society that was singled out by the state through the conferral of degrees and tax privileges to form a bond with the imperial bureaucracy. The examination system was the mechanism that the state used to gradually replace the local elders and notables with people whose prerogatives depended foremost on the state itself.⁴⁴¹ This group of degree holders, which included those at every level, was defined both by local prestige and power, and by privileges conferred from above. Their local position may have been based on good works and deeds, but it was often based as well on the influence they exerted through their powerful retainers and bondservants. While the higher officials served in urban areas by

437 See Sakai, *Chügoku zensho*, among others. That phenomenon became increasingly popular when gentry became more locally based, see below; until then, commendation involved, for the most part, princely estates.

438 Where privileges did not include exemption from regular corvée (in contrast to irregular corvée) and this was high, sometimes even gentry members were reluctant to buy land, as, for example, Hai Jui (1513–87) commented, this was remedied after the single whip according to Yao Ju-hsün in his “Chi-chuang i” (Proposal on absentee landlords), quoted by Shigeta “Kyōson shihai no seiritsu to kōzō,” rev. ed., p. 197 and p. 205, n. 44, from the *T’ien-hsia chün-kuo li-ping-shu*. For Hai Jui, see his biography in *DMB*, pp. 474–79, and, for example, Michel Cartier, *Une réforme locale en Chine au XVI^e siècle, Hai Rui à Chun’an 1558–1562*, *Le monde d’Outre-mer*, Passé et présent, 1ère série, Érudites, 39 (Paris, 1973).

439 Famous artists and others, of course, sometimes shunned the company of the local wealthy and powerful and acquired their fame by being aloof “mountain hermits” (*shan-jen*). Cf. Willard J. Peterson, *Bitter gourd – Fang I-chih and the impetus for intellectual change* (New Haven, 1979), p. 130.

440 See, for example, Chang Ying’s (1638–1708) treatise, in which land ownership is only recommended because it is safer. See Beattie, *Land and lineage*. For Chang, see also Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 64–65.

441 The more so, since this privileged status was constantly redistributed among different families and was not a direct result of landownership. See Shigeta Atsushi, “Kyōson shihai no seiritsu to kōzō,” and his “Kyōshin no rekishiteki seikaku o megutte – kyōshinkan no keifu,” *Jinbun kenkyū (rekishigaku)* (*Fumatsu Katsuo kyōju tainin kinen gō*), 22, No. 4 (March 1971), pp. 85–97.

necessity,⁴⁴² there were also many gentry dwelling in rural areas, some of whom were paternalistic managerial landlords. Politically and socio-economically, degree holders, because they were degree holders, had a special relation to the state that other, perhaps wealthier, groups could not attain without purchasing a similar official status. Whether degree holders thought of themselves or behaved as a special group (and there is much evidence that in some sense they did think of themselves as a special group) or not, it is analytically important to stress this economic aspect of degree-holding in order to understand late Ming society. Degree holders were by no means an economic class in the Marxist sense of the word, but they were an objective and important stratum of Ming society that was politically and economically defined.⁴⁴³

Instead of using economic or social criteria to define who the gentry were, some authors use the term “gentry” in a normative sense. These authors define the gentry as a group of people who behaved the way the elite was supposed to behave, who by their education for a degree were steeped in Confucian morality and ethics and who tried to apply their education practically by ensuring the reproduction of the community through underwriting social welfare institutions, financing and supervising irrigation projects, mediating in local disputes, and so forth.⁴⁴⁴ In this view, the gentry were morally, intellectually, ideologically, and culturally the “leaders of the people” and were politically and economically influential

442 But through their retainers and bailiffs they kept in contact with their rural properties.

443 In Japan this debate is called the “gentry landownership” (*kyōshinteki tochi shoyū*) controversy, the first proponents of which were Saeki Yūichi in 1957 and Yasuno Shōzō in 1961, when absentee landownership was first directly linked to officials. See Saeki Yūichi, “Minmatsu no Tōshi no hen – iwayuru ‘nuhen’ no seikaku ni kanren shite,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 16, No. 1 (June 1957), pp. 26–57, and Yasuno, “Minmatsu Shinsho Yōsukō chūryū iki no daitochi shoyū.” Efforts have been made to incorporate in this view the power gentry would exert over peasants other than their direct tenants and to explain the gentry domination of all aspects of local society. This is the so-called “gentry control” point of view espoused by Shigeta, “Kyōson shihai no seiritsu to kōzō,” which, while exaggerated, remains the most lucid hypothesis on the subject; but see also Adachi Keiji, “Chūgoku hōkenseiron no hihanteki kentō,” *Rekishi hyōron*, 400 (August 1983), pp. 134–51. Such power over otherwise independent peasants was exercised through land market control, usury, markets, force, relations with officials, influence on the judicial process, irrigation practices, and charity. For some overviews of the debate, see Mori Masao, “Iwayuru ‘kyōshinteki tochi shoyū’ron o megutte – daikai yohi hōkoku ni kaete,” *Rekishi hyōron*, 304 (August 1975), pp. 11–16; Mori Masao, “Nihon no Min–Shin jidai shi kenkyū ni okeru kyōshinron ni tsuite,” *Rekishi hyōron*, 308 (December 1975), pp. 40–60; 312 (April 1976), pp. 74–84; 314 (June 1976), pp. 113–280; O Kūm-sōng, “Ilbon e issōsō ūi Chungguk Myōng–Ch’ōng sidae sinsach’ung yōn’gu e taehayō ŭi,” *Tong’a munhwa* 15 (December 1978), pp. 198–220, trans. as “Nihon ni okeru Chūgoku Min–Shin jidai shinshisō kenkyū ni tsuite,” *Mindaishi kenkyū*, 7 (November 1979), pp. 21–45; and Danjō Hiroshi, “Min–Shin kyōshinron,” ch. 6 of *Sengo Nihon no Chūgokushi ronsō*, ed. Tanigawa Michio (Nagoya, 1993), pp. 192–233.

444 For a Ch’ing overview, see, for example, Ch’ü T’ung-tsu, *Local government in China under the Ch’ing* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).

solely as a result of this; and for this reason they formed the axis about which the social order revolved.⁴⁴⁵ As local leaders, they functioned as the reliable local assistants to the magistrate, who, coming from another area and leaving within three years, needed all the local support he could muster. Members of the gentry, who felt they had a moral duty to save the world, might oppose certain magistrates or official policies, but only for the common good. According to this view, the gentry stood against the selfishness of other landowners without degrees and the rapaciousness of local tycoons and bullies and, thus, represented the best that Confucian idealism had to offer.

The problem with this view of the gentry is that it obscures the very important fact that, especially after 1530, the words translated as gentry (*hsiang-kuan*, *hsiang-shen*, etc.) were mostly used in a pejorative sense to describe people who abused their prerogatives and privileges and, by extension, those who, with them, under them, and often with their knowledge, formed a band of local riff-raff composed of their bondservants, litigation brokers, henchmen, and well-placed clerks in the yamen. Only very gradually did a minor portion of the degree holders or gentry react against this (though certainly they were not the only ones who did). “Moral leaders,” including some degree holders, were so opposed to this gentry in the larger sense and were so critical of the *hsiang-shen* that they highlighted their disgust in the morality books (*shan-shu*) they wrote and published.

Rather than the gentry, it was in fact the magistrates who acted earliest for the public good. Despite many assertions to the contrary, the gentry, far from serving “broadly public” functions⁴⁴⁶ stood for very narrowly defined interests: they would defend their own county at the expense of another, forgetting that without cooperation both counties would fall. In the late Ming, the gentry were not really the “local leaders” for the very reason that they comprised too small a group, they had to look countywide to find people with similar degrees, and they formed countywide networks with interests quite separate from those of the local society. They might have argued for actions that benefited other inhabitants of their county, but benefiting others was often not the purpose of their involvement: the

445 This normative view of the gentry is, for example, clear in Miyazaki Ichisada, “Mindai So-Shō chihō no shidaifu to minshū,” *Sbirin*, 37, No. 3 (June 1933), pp. 1–33; cf. Mori Masao, “Mindai no kyōshin-shitaifu o chiki shakai to no kanren ni tsuite no oboegaki,” *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronshū* (*Sbigaku*, 26), (March 1980), pp. 1–11, trans. as “The gentry in the Ming: an outline of the relations between the shih-ta-fu and local society,” *Acta Asiatica*, 38 (1980), pp. 31–53.

446 The term is Dennerline’s: see Dennerline, *The Chia-ting loyalists*.

constant efforts of these “public-spirited” gentry to have tax items transferred to neighboring counties benefited their own situation.⁴⁴⁷

When a sub-group of the gentry finally became convinced that the social unrest brought about by their lack of involvement in the community might prove disastrous to them, they made an appeal to other members of the gentry: for selfish reasons alone (and from fear of religious retribution), it might be better to obey the authorities or customary rules by contributing to irrigation projects, local granaries, village covenants (*hsiang-yüeh*), and local security (*pao-chia*) systems or welfare groups. Even so, such “moral” members of the gentry⁴⁴⁸ were ambivalent in the sense that their “public” spirit favored highly localized interests and opposed the welfare schemes (public or religious) proposed by other members of the local elite. This is not to deny that there were groups that were locally acknowledged to be the moral leaders of society, were self-conscious about this, and professed concern for the public good and the conduct of public affairs and projects.⁴⁴⁹ These people, however, were not the group that was designated by the terms *hsiang-shen* or *shen-chin*.⁴⁵⁰ Social reality was fluid, but the relationship of the politically and economically privileged gentry group both with the local elite and with the

447 Dennerline, who, it is true, does not deny “narrowly private” concerns of the gentry alongside the “broadly public” ones, himself cites several examples which he explains as public spirit, but should be interpreted differently. At least, I do not see a “public” spirit exceeding local money interests when the gentry members argue in favor of withholding military supplies to “increase local confidence” when the dynasty is falling to foreign invaders. See Dennerline, *The Chia-ting loyalists*, p. 41. Nor do I see the “clearly broadset” interest in arguing with a high-flown, impractical rhetoric that “it would cost [the state] more in popular confidence than it would gain in rice,” when they opposed the conversion to tax silver back into rice to defray the skyrocketing expenses incurred during defensive wars against the Manchus. See, for example, Dennerline, *The Chia-ting loyalists*, p. 201. They even argued against local mobilization by “self-interested” serious community leaders and stayed aloof from real local community work. It is no surprise that the gentry could not count on followers. I do not argue so much against the division of gentry-community leaders proposed by Dennerline as I object to calling the gentry “publicly spirited” and the community leaders “self-interested,” even if in their own rhetoric – such terms were used.

448 The Tung-lin group might be the most prominent example; yet Mizoguchi Yūzō counted only 150 of them! See Mizoguchi Yūzō, “Iwayuru Tōrinha jinshi no shisō – zenkindaiki ni okeru Chūgoku shisō no tenkai,” *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 75 (March 1978), pp. 111–341.

449 This is Timothy Brook’s definition of the “gentry,” which he takes to be a social network excluding merchants, elders, or strongmen. I would certainly include some of the first two groups, certainly the elders, who functionally form perhaps the same group on a slightly lower level. Brook might mean the people officially appointed “elder,” who could be coercive strongmen instead of moral leaders. See Brook, Timothy, “Gentry domination in Chinese society: Monasteries and lineages in the structuring of local society, 1500–1700” (Diss., Harvard University, 1985).

450 Strictly speaking, the term *hsiang* means the sub-county, which enjoyed a real, but semi-official, existence during the Ming, somewhere between the county and the *li* unit. In the terms *hsiang-shen* or *hsiang-kuan*, however, it does not mean more than “local.” “local” meaning anything from the province to the sub-county, depending on the context. The term came to be used as a prefix to the different terms meaning officials or degree holders from about 1500, and meant, in the foremost sense, “countywide.” *Shen* was used quite early alongside such terms as *shih-ta-fu* (here translated

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acknowledged moral vanguard needs to be investigated and described, not assumed *a priori* to be the case. No doubt those moral leaders who advocated abolishing the examination system altogether (Ch'en Ch'i-hsin in 1635) or who advocated transforming degree holders into commoners (Li Chin in 1636) had the average, self-interested degree holder in mind.⁴⁵¹

Local society might have been dominated by other principles or groups as well. These dominating elements could have been the lineage and the family;⁴⁵² landlords, as owners of land, as leaders of community functions, and as responsible representatives for taxes and corvée; the gentry, through their landownership and privileges; the moral elite (*shih-ta-fu*) group, which was motivated by Confucian ideals and by their sense of moral crisis, and which enjoyed the widest prestige; the state, which increasingly took over community and other "public" functions; and finally, the organizations of the local people themselves, about which we know very little, but which we sometimes see acting in the anti-rent, anti-gentry, anti-eunuch, or religious struggles and revolts. In the worst cases, sheer violence and military power might have been the decisive factors in establishing local leadership and, in the late Ming, local strongmen became ever more powerful. In other cases, literary fame or wealth was the basis for local leadership.⁴⁵³ One author has hypothesized that there was a change in the way social status was determined from basing it on the bonds of peer relationships to basing it on one's relation-

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as "elite"), and in the term *chin-shen* or *shen-chin* since the Cheng-te period. It included only officials, either current, retired, or on leave, a point stressed by Sakai, *Chügokuzensho*. In the Ming, in contrast to the Sung period, officials were not supposed to sever relations with their lineage or locality. Provincial degree holders (*chü-jen*) without official posts were not included in the term *shen* until late Ming (Ch'ung-chen) times. For the nonofficial degree holders, the term *chin*, or sometimes *shih* was used. Dennerline, "Fiscal reform," makes a more social distinction between the gentry with official connections and those without, which basically would draw the line in a similar way, although paying more attention to the subjective interests of the gentry involved. There are some very rare examples when bachelors (*sheng-yüan*) were also included in the term *hsiang-shen* (one dates from 1612), but that was not a normal Ming practice; they are included, however, in such terms as *shih-ta-fu*. See Wada Masahiro, "Minmatsu Shinsho no kyōshin yōgo ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu," *Kyūshū daigaku Tōyōshi ronshū*, 9 (March 1981), pp. 79–109. The term *shen* originally referred to the belt indicating official rank worn by Chou officials, while *chin* referred to the collar border on the prescribed leisure dress of every degree holder from the bachelors (*sheng-yüan*) up.

451 See, for these authors, Dennerline, "Fiscal reform."

452 For some fine studies of the relationship of landlords, gentry, family and local control, see Kitamura Hironao, "Gi-shi san kyōdai to sono," *Keizai gaku nenpō* 7, No. 8 ([1957–1958]) rpt. in his *Shindai shakai keizai shi kenkyū* (Kyōto, 1971), pp. 88–153, on the Wei; Terada Takanobu, "Sensei Dōshū no Ba-shi-Min-Shin jidai ni okeru ichi kyōyōshi kenkyū," 33, No. 3 (December 1974), pp. 156–82, on the Ma; and especially Okuzaki, *Chügoku kyōshin jinushi*, and Hamashima Atsutoshi, "Minmatsu Kōnan kyōshin no gutaizō – Nanjun Shō-shi ni tsuit." In *Minmatsu Shinhoki no kenkyū*, eds. Iwami Hiroshi and Taniguchi Kikuo (Kyoto, 1989), pp. 165–223, on the Yüan family.

453 For the different factors mentioned, see the very systematic but not conclusive article by Mori Masao, "Chügoku zenkindaishi kenkyū ni okeru chiiki shakai no shiten – Chügokushi jinpojiumu 'Chiiki shakai no shiten-chiiki shakai to riida kichō,'" *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronshū (Shigaku)* (March 1982), pp. 201–23.

ship to authority, that is, on the basis of kinship bonds.⁴⁵⁴ Indeed, the increase in the reliance on (sometimes fictional) kinship bonds is very clear in the late Ming. However, an increase in horizontal peer relationship bonds, of which the formation of a countywide *hsiang-shen* network is an example, largely parallels this change. The very late Ming saw a reaction by the state and commoners alike against gentry abuse in the equalized land and equalized corvée (*chün-t'ien-chün-i*) reforms (see below), and gradually a small portion of gentry came to accept that only reforms that strictly prohibited gentry abuses could obviate major social upheavals.⁴⁵⁵

Degree holders became important and problematic after the middle of the sixteenth century, but their privileges had already existed since Sung times.⁴⁵⁶ How and why their social position changed during Ming times remains to be shown.⁴⁵⁷

One major area in which the Ming differed from earlier dynasties was the educational system. During the Ming, the school system and examination system (*k'o-chü*) were linked together, so that only officially recognized students could sit for the examination; while on the other hand, the school system and its showcase, the National Academy, lost importance as a separate way to officialdom outside the examination system.⁴⁵⁸ Also, in contrast to earlier times, the examination degrees of the *chin-shih* (advanced scholar or metropolitan degree holder: those who had passed the metropolitan and palace

⁴⁵⁴ Brook, "Gentry domination."

⁴⁵⁵ In 1624, members of the gentry in Hai-yen themselves asked to pay two-thirds of their exemptions to divert opposition. Mori, "Nihon no Min-Shin jidai shi kenkyū ni okeru kyōshinron," parts 1 to 3, outlines this three-stage development of Ming socio-economic history.

⁴⁵⁶ Or, as O remarks, also in Vietnam since 1428, although a gentry stratum did not develop there. See O Kūm-sōng, "Myōng-dae sinsach'ung ūi hyōngsōng kwajōng e taehayo." In *Chindan hakepo* (October 1979), pp. 39–72, trans. as "Mindai shinshisō no keisei katei ni suite," trans. Yamane Yukio and Inada Hideko, *Mindaishi kenkyū*, 8 (November 1980), pp. 39–60; 9 (October 1981), pp. 19–44. In the following, I limit myself to civil degrees.

⁴⁵⁷ This question has been investigated by the Japanese author Wada Masahiro and the Korean O Kūm-sōng, the first investigating the changes in social composition of the terms *hsiang-shen*, etc., as well as their privileges, the second investigating demographic changes in the different strata within the Ming gentry. See Wada Masahiro, "Mindai kyojinsō no keisei katei ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu-kakyo jōrei no kentō o chūshin to shite," *Shigaku zasshi*, 87, No. 3 (March 1978), pp. 36–71; Wada Masahiro, "Yōeki yūmen jōrei no tenkai to Minmatsu kyojin no hōteki ichi-men'eki kijungaku no kentō o tsūjite," *Tōyō gakubō*, 60, Nos. 1–2 (November 1978), pp. 93–131; O, "Mindai shinshisō no keisei katei"; and O Kūm-sōng, "Myōng-dae sinsach'ung ūi sahoe idong e taehayō, *Sōnggok non-ch'ong*, 13 (1982), pp. 86–122, trans. as "Mindai shinshisō no shakai idō ni suite," trans. Yamane Yukio, *Mindaishi kenkyū*, 14 (March 1986), pp. 23–48; 15 (March 1987), pp. 47–66. For the relationship between degrees and official posts, see also Wada Masahiro, "Mindai no chihōkan posuto ni okeru mibunsei jōretsū ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu," *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 44, No. 1 (June 1985), pp. 77–109.

⁴⁵⁸ The system remained "open" in the sense that everybody could sit for the school entrance exams, but the *k'o-chü* examinations themselves were not open anymore for individuals unrelated to the schools. See Terada Takanobu, "Kuan-yü 'hsiang-shen,'" in *Ming-Ch'ing-shih kuo-chi hsüeh-shu t'ao-lun-hui mi-shu-ch'u lun-wen tsu, Ming-Ch'ing-shih kuo-chi hsüeh-shu t'ao-lun-hui lun-wen-chi* (T'ien-chin, 1982), pp. 112–25. Earlier attempts to a similar arrangement had taken place during the Hsiung (1068–77) period under Wang An-shih.

examinations), and of the *chü-jen* (elevated man or provincial degree holder: those who had successfully passed the provincial examination) remained valid throughout a degree holder's life.⁴⁵⁹

From the beginning of the Ming, each degree holder, including the lowly *sheng-yüan* (bachelors) received corvée exemptions for himself and at least two other members of his family. Earlier exemptions, however, had been restricted to those who had actually served in office. The objective conditions necessary for the gentry to develop into a political and socio-economical class were, therefore, already present in the early Ming. The reason that the gentry did not form a conspicuous group then was because they were few in number, and official vacancies were much more numerous and accessible even to members of the lower strata of society.⁴⁶⁰ Gradually, however, while the number of officials hovered between 25,000 and 40,000, the number of degree holders increased from 100,000 to 550,000.

The holders of the lowest "degree,"⁴⁶¹ the bachelor's (*sheng-yüan*), saw the greatest increases in their numbers: from 30,000 during the Hung-wu period, to 60,000 in about 1430, to 180,000 in about 1513, to 500,000 in the late Ming.⁴⁶² Clearly, they could not reasonably expect to receive any official post when increasingly even the provincial degree holders (*chü-jen*) were without office. The title was still eagerly sought because it conferred privileges of exemption from corvée. Bachelors (*sheng-yüan*) often saw themselves as a group distinct from commoners, the more so because they lacked upward mobility. Despite repeated prohibitions after the early sixteenth century against their associations and against their interference in politics and local affairs, they acted together in protests against examination results or against

459 This life-long validity was only *de facto* true in the case of bachelors (*sheng-yüan*: those who had passed nominally the school entrance exams): they had to renew their status by retaking exams every two or three years, but failure could be bought off by a low amount of rice. Similar practices prevailed in the Academy; see, O, "Mindai shinshisō no keisei katei," part 1.

460 See, among others, Oh Keum-song [O Kūm-sōng], "New light on the Chinese gentry: their formation and social mobility" (Paper prepared for the 11th annual meeting of the mid-Atlantic region of the Association for Asian Studies, October 22–24, 1982, Pittsburgh); O Kūm-sōng, "Mindai no kokka kenryoku to shinshi no sonzai keitai." In *Higashi Ajia sekaishi tankyū*, eds. T'eng Wei-tsao, Wang Chung-lo, Okuzaki Hiroshi, and Kobayashi Kazumi (Tokyo, 1986), pp. 267–80; O, "Mindai shinshisō no keisei katei;" and O, "Mindai shinshisō no shakai idō."

461 Strictly speaking, it was but a qualification for sitting for the provincial examinations, and had to be obtained repeatedly by school students; for an interesting example, see Peterson, *Bitter gourd*, p. 48.

462 O, "Mindai shinshisō no keisei katei," part 2. According to him, using Ho Ping-ti's population estimates (too low in our opinion, as outlined above), this constituted a rise from 0.046 percent to 0.33 percent of the total population, and he contrasts this with a figure of 0.18 percent at the end of the Ch'ing. The population estimates given above would indicate a similar rate for the late Ming to that for the late Ch'ing, implying an equal importance of degree holders from Ming to Ch'ing, not a drop.

the education officers.⁴⁶³ They even combined together to expel local officials or to demand tax reductions for their own locales. Although they sometimes might have been mistakenly understood to be representing the interests of their own county,⁴⁶⁴ they tended to defend their privileges jealously against the “commoners” who, in turn, strongly resented them.

Of all the privileges accorded to degree holders (including preferential legal treatment, the right for higher officials to possess “slaves,” sumptuary rights to distinguish themselves ostentatiously from commoners, the right for degree holders to ask for more tax exemptions, and the right of social access to officials), the corvée exemptions were the most important and the most disruptive of the socio-political structure.

Until the beginning of the Cheng-t’ung period, the rules governing the exemptions degree holders were given were still rather clear. The bachelor (*sheng-yüan*) was exempted from miscellaneous corvée for himself and for two additional men (*ting*). Provincial degree holders (*chü-jen*) and National Academy students (*chien-sheng*) had the same exemptions; serving officials had more. All still had to perform regular corvée. After the equalized service (*chiün-yao*) reforms gained momentum, however, many regular and miscellaneous corvée payments were amalgamated, resulting in confusion and in claims by degree holders that their land-based payments included items from which they were exempted. Officials who saw the danger of increasing the numbers of people eligible for exemptions and who wanted to limit the number of exemptions opposed these claims. The first such attempt to limit exemptions took place in 1494. New rules were proclaimed in 1504 that exempted metropolitan officials from all miscellaneous corvée. Provincial officials were given some exemptions according to their rank that included exemptions from land-based corvée assessments. Changes occurred frequently thereafter.⁴⁶⁵ With the new exemptions on land, and with many officials possessing less land than the maximum amount of exemptable land they were officially allowed to claim, corvée evasion through commendation

463 *T’i-hsiieh-kuan*, under whose authority the government, quite aware of the dangers uncontrolled bachelors (*sheng-yüan*) could present, had placed them in 1436. See among others, Terada, “Kuan-yü ‘hsiang-shen’.”

464 Since most taxes had come to be calculated on a countywide basis, late-Ming gentry organizations always seem to have had the politically defined county, rather than settlement (as was the case with lineages), *li* or *ch’ü*-units (as had been the case with *li-chang* and *liang-chang*), or other cultural or marketing areas as their base. Purely economic areas might not have formed yet; see Kishimoto Mio, “Kōki nenkan no kōken ni tsuite – Shinsho keizai shisō no ichi sokumen,” *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kijiō*, 89 (September 1982), pp. 251–306.

465 In 1521, for example, exemptions for metropolitan officials ranged from 4,000 (first rank A) to 1,000 *mu* (ninth rank B). See Chang Hsien-ch’ing, “Ming-tai kuan-shen yu-mien.”

(*kuei-chi*) became a problem: on paper, at least, friends and family entrusted their landholdings to such officials to take advantage of this exemption.⁴⁶⁶

This practice was strictly forbidden in 1531, but to make up for it, assessments on males (*ting*) and land-based exemptions were made interchangeable. In the likely event that an exempted household did not possess the allotted number of exempted males (*ting*) (twenty for a first rank metropolitan official), it could exchange these exemptions for males (*ting*) for an increase in its exempt land-based assessments; that is, it could be exempted from more than the 20 *tan* of rice already allowed. In 1545, exemptions were increased, but the possibility of interchanging exemptions for males (*ting*) and exemptions for land (*mu*) was stopped, only to be reinstated in 1587.⁴⁶⁷

The trend towards miscellaneous corvée exemptions determined on the basis of an amount of land resulted in confusion with regard to tax liability and regular corvée payments, especially in Chiang-nan. Local magistrates tried to remedy the increase in corvée exemptions based on land. The ten-sector system (*shih-tuan-fa*) reform (see above) attempted to ensure that exemptions based on land would be limited only to official households and would be applied only once in ten years. It seems, however, that with every new effort to regulate and limit tax exemptions, the government had to increase their absolute amount. Also, with the development of gentry society, degrees became a much more important means of obtaining corvée exemptions than official rank. A metropolitan degree holder (*chin-shih*) in 1581 Chia-hsing could claim exemption for 3,000 *mu* and a provincial degree holder (*chü-jen*) for 1,500, which was more than an official of the first rank could claim at the beginning of the dynasty. Land in excess of the exempted amount was liable for the normal payments.⁴⁶⁸ Slowly the provincial degree holders (*chü-jen*) separated themselves from the National Academy students (*chien-sheng*): even without an official post one provincial degree holder (*chü-jen*) could boast ten times the exemptions a National Academy student (*chien-sheng*) received, even though the two groups originally had received the same exemptions during the early Ming.

Regulations meant to be final were promulgated in 1610. Again, exemptions were greatly increased, but they now became countywide quotas, so

466 This was never legally allowed, but Chang Hsien-ch'ing (Ming-tai kuan-shen yu-mien) mentions a case in Wu-hsi where gentry members apparently received money from the magistrate if their holdings did not reach the exempted amount.

467 The highest exemption was 1,500 *mu*. Retired officials could count on seven-tenths the "normal" amount, officials on leave on one-half. A retired official who had held the ninth rank still had more exemptions than a *chü-jen* degree holder, which explains why complaints against commendations were still mainly directed against "official households."

468 This excess land was classified as "officials' land" (*kuan-t'ien*); elsewhere this term was used for the exempted land; see Wada Masahiro, "Yōeki yūmen jōrei," p. 115.

that later increases in members of the gentry who were eligible for them would only result in a decrease in the average exemption in a given district. One metropolitan degree holder (*chin-shih*) received ten times the exemption he had received previously, a provincial degree holder (*chü-jen*) six times, a regular National Academy student (*chien-sheng*) four times, while a purchased *chien-sheng* degree received double the exemption originally conferred with the degree. Compared with the early Ming, the provincial degree holders (*chü-jen*) fared best: even one without a post had had the amount of corvée from which he was exempted increased twenty to thirty times, in contrast to ten times for a metropolitan degree holder (*chin-shih*) of the first rank. However, the amount of a bachelor's (*sheng-yüan*) exemption hardly increased at all.⁴⁶⁹

The state and late Ming water control

Among the first areas where problems occurred during the late Ming, and where the state, in the person of vigorous local magistrates, finally had to assume a larger role than had previously been the case, were irrigation practices, which were breaking down, and local famine relief. The old pattern of organization for developing and maintaining irrigation systems had used part of the corvée labor provided under a modified administrative community (*li-chia*) system based on a working local community. This approach, however, had become unworkable by the late Ming.

In these matters, as in the problems connected with land based corvée exemptions and absentee landownership, some vigorous local magistrates and dedicated members of the gentry tried novel solutions during the period from 1570 to 1660, a period that witnessed the beginnings of increased government participation in the communal functions of society, which now could involve an entire county and not just one community (*li*) or one canton.⁴⁷⁰

Contemporary sources state that the breakdown in irrigation practices began during the early sixteenth century. They give several reasons for the breakdown.⁴⁷¹ Originally, irrigation projects had been the responsibility of the larger resident landlords, who supervised the other landowners in the

469 Wada Masahiro, "Yōeki yūmen jōrei."

470 The word "community" has many meanings, and I limit myself here to regularly occurring cooperative structures. I do not deal here with other types of communities, even if some of them, such as those religious ones settling themselves in Chinese cities in Mongol territory, also developed as an alternative to the Ming tax system, as is shown in their treatment of Ming tax collectors. See Fuma Susumu, "Mindai byakurenkyō no ichi kōsatsu – keizai tōsō to no kanren to atarashi," *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 35, No. 1 (June 1976), pp. 1–26.

471 We are dealing here mainly with irrigation projects of medium or smaller scale; larger projects had always been organized by the state by conscripting several people from each *li-chia*. The largest projects could use as many as 200,000 man days. See Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*.

community (*li*). Indeed, where reclamation by landlords still took place, as it did around the Tung-t'ing Lake and in Kwangtung, wealthy local landowners still had enough resources and incentives to continue that practice. Elsewhere, however, increased commercialization and a reliance on cash crops had resulted in the broad presence of a group that was not directly interested in, and that did not benefit by maintaining irrigation systems.⁴⁷² Powerful strongmen began usurping the use of communally owned creeks, lakes, or drainage ponds for their own benefit, and the heads of polders (*p'ang-chang*) could not always control them any more. The heads of polders (*p'ang-chang*) were either exploited, abused, or bullied by magistrates or gentry members and were sometimes abusive themselves, an attitude that bode ill for gaining community cooperation on projects.

One text mentions five causes for the breakdown in the areas of irrigation and famine relief. First, the number of poor tenants had increased. Their poverty rendered them incapable of doing the community tasks which formerly had been and which still commonly were required of all inhabitants of a polder. Second, there was not enough supervision for such things as irrigation maintenance because the wealthy had moved elsewhere or had invested their money elsewhere: landholding was no longer their major concern. Third, the need for irrigation was not perceived because of the increase in raising cash crops that did not require (and often did not allow the time for) irrigation projects — this had become true both for tenants as well as the former, now often absentee, landlords. Fourth, there was an increase in the number of absentee landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*). Large owners' landholdings and small peasants' holdings had become so mixed up by this time that the "free rider" problem started: everybody hoped to reap the benefits of others' work at irrigation maintenance without providing any labor themselves. And fifth, the tenants feared that if they took up the landlords' business of maintaining the irrigation system (or continued to do so if they only recently had become tenants), they would only increase the profitability of the land with the result that the landlord might take away their right of tenancy in order to sell the land for a higher price to another tenant. Since a governmental undertaking would result in surtaxes for everybody, no one was willing to ask local officials to undertake the supervision of irrigation systems either.⁴⁷³

The breakdown of the rural community is also evidenced by the fact that locally powerful strongmen and landlords increasingly used river mud,

472 Wheat sometimes replaced rice as a food crop in Su-chou.

473 See Kawakatsu, *Chügoku bōken kokka*, pp. 627–28. The text is Keng Chü, *Chang-shu hsien shui-li ch'üan-shu*, and pertains to 1620–21.

water plants, and lakes illegally for personal profit where these things formerly had been communal. References to this phenomenon date from 1530 on.⁴⁷⁴

Under such conditions, bad weather could result in worse crises than had been experienced previously, and general economic crises did occur with increasing frequency.⁴⁷⁵ In the face of these crises, and of the realization that the old community-based famine relief system could not realistically be expected to function anymore, the government increasingly had to provide official famine relief. The famine around Nanking in 1640–42 met with many vigorous responses that some authors would see as typical of the Ch'ing: the government took a flexible approach that involved providing incentives for the private market, for merchants, and for gentry to insure that food would be transported to areas of need.⁴⁷⁶

In the end, trends such as the abuse of irrigation systems, increasing lawlessness, and economic crises could not be allowed to continue, and the state increasingly interfered locally in matters regarding irrigation during late Ming times.⁴⁷⁷ The state, in the persons of vigorous local officials, organized

474 Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka*. There is a debate involved here: Hamashima had maintained that the use of these types of mud fertilizer was a private right of landlords recognized by the state. While Hamashima has shown that creeks, etc., could be privately owned and inherited in the sixteenth century, he has not countered the objections that most texts say clearly that the private use of river mud, etc., was illegal, and Mori has supported Kawakatsu to the extent of acknowledging a communal use in the early Ming. I think the two views can be reconciled by pointing out that in the sixteenth century many new creeks were made out of land that had owners, and this ownership could very well have been transferred also to the newly dug creeks. See also Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*; Hamashima, "The organization of water control in the Kiangnan delta in the Ming period," *Acta Asiatica*, 38 (1980), pp. 69–92; and Mori, "Nihon no Min-Shin jidai shi kenkyū ni okeru kyōshinron," parts 1 to 3.

475 Of the pre-modern, so-called Labrousse type, where higher rice prices did not compensate for the decrease in marketed rice, since most people had nothing to sell. See, for example, in 1630, the crisis described by the famous Ch'en Lung-cheng (1585–1645). See his biography in the *DMB*, pp. 174–76. For the famine, see Kawakatsu Mamoru, "Minmatsu, Chōkō deruta no shakai to kōsei," in Nishijima Sadao hakushi kanreki kinen ronsō henshū iinkai, ed., *Nishijima Sadao hakushi kanreki kinen – Higashi Ajia shi ni okeru kokka to nōmin* (Tokyo, 1984), pp. 487–515; for Ch'en, see, for example, *DMB*, pp. 174–76. This type was different from the early K'ang-hsi depression: then, there was an overproduction of food; since cultivation had increased faster than population food prices fell. The agricultural population did not have sufficient income to generate a demand for non-agricultural products, and consequently a total economic depression, witnessed with increasing clarity by contemporary writers, ensued; see Kishimoto, "Kōki nenkan no kokusen."

476 Kawakatsu, "Minmatsu, Chōkō deruta no shakai to kōsei," which introduces (but does not yet thoroughly analyze) the documents dealing with this famine; but see also Kawakatsu Mamoru, *Min-Shin Kōnan nōgyō keizai shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1992), ch. 4. Again, the Ch'ing system was not as innovative as is often supposed; in some respects (financial ones for example) it might have been more effective, but basically the state system of dealing with famines was already in place and relatively successful, even in the less than ideal circumstances of the government in the 1640s.

477 There is some discussion of to what extent state interference took place in the division of the polders into smaller ones, a process we already encountered. Hamashima Atsutoshi supposes it to have been high and notes that smaller polders also made it easier for the state to organize smaller irrigation

Footnote continued on next page

irrigation schemes by relying on local residents, whether they were landlords, owner-cultivators, or tenants. Nobody was exempted from contributions, not even the degree holders who claimed corvée exemptions: irrigation maintenance, the state proclaimed, was not corvée. Cultivators were organized on the basis of territorial units. Often, these units were polders which might or might not be communities in other senses (for example, religious communities). Every cultivator had to participate according to the amount of land he cultivated in the polders, and if he was not the landowner, he had to be paid by his landlord for participating. The state guaranteed this payment, and a tenant who was not paid for his work by his landlord⁴⁷⁸ was allowed to subtract twice that amount from the rent due his landlord at harvest.⁴⁷⁹ Another alternative was the use of *ni-p'ou* (mud masters) who were basically irrigation project contractors and who were mainly hired in areas where cotton was grown; that is, in areas in which it was more attractive not to engage in food production, and hence, irrigation. The state itself did not directly supervise or contribute money to irrigation projects unless the projects involved a combination of several polders or large rivers.⁴⁸⁰

The late Ming reform of the tax and corvée structure

Another problem dating from the sixteenth century was the presence of an increasing number of absentee landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*), that is, landlords whose land was dispersed over what had originally been several territorial community (*li*) units and who legally did not pay corvée duties in communities other than the one in which their original landholding was based.⁴⁸¹ Land taxes were due, but were difficult to collect. Sometimes the taxes would all be payable in the landlord's community (*li*) of residence. This discrepancy made impossible demands on the clerks and tax collectors: how could they possibly know of all a landlord's landholdings elsewhere. Sometimes

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projects; often, the land necessary for digging creeks was first bought by the state, and its taxes were not re-distributed. Other private land could be made tax-exempt as well, while the profits from the resulting creeks (river mud as fertilizer, some reeds, fish) could be privately owned. On the other hand, former *fang*, pond or reservoir land was often taxed at a higher rate after it had become just paddy land. Others have shown that at least in some cases, the polder division was a natural affair, and often perhaps community-led.

478 Payment was necessary, since there were now such money yielding alternatives as handicrafts and cash crops in what had been the agricultural lax period. Cf. Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*, p. 177.

479 During the Hung-chih period (1488–1505), we see the first mention of a kind of contribution system for people who did not themselves participate in the work. See Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*.

480 The very detailed notices Keng Chū has left us with, listing in detail all the work to be done, the measurements of mud to be dug, the extent of contributions by the "people" and less often by the state, unequivocally show the resurgence of state power at the local level, even if not all of his projects were undertaken owing to the lack of financial resources.

481 In some cases they counted as one *ling*, in others they were always exempted.

the taxes were payable to the “territorial” community (*li*) where the land was located and from which the landlord was absent. In such cases, tenants might be assessed, a practice that created a direct link between state officials and tenants for tax purposes.⁴⁸² Because a community (*li*) was still officially a unit of households on the records even where tenants paid their landlords’ taxes, these taxes still had to be exchanged on a higher level between different communities (*li*) or even between different counties. Again, this was an activity that involved much paperwork and provided many opportunities for fraud.⁴⁸³

The presence of absentee landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*) had become widespread in Ming China in the sixteenth century. Some percentage of the land everywhere was owned by such landlords. At the local level, such land could constitute more than 10 percent of the cultivated land available. This exacerbated the problems that officials experienced as a result of the commendation of land to tax or corvée-exempt people.⁴⁸⁴ The origins of the practice of absentee landlordism were varied; we have to bear in mind that buying land outside one’s own locale was often a perfectly legal way to evade corvée assessments. There were sometimes other reasons for the practice. In Kwangtung, many irrigation projects had been undertaken in Ming times.⁴⁸⁵ These reclamation projects had come to be led by powerful strongmen who, in order to benefit themselves, forced others to reclaim land. Consequently, these original providers of capital and supervision often lived somewhere other than in the locality where the new land had been reclaimed. To remedy the problem caused by the amount of land owned by absentee landlords, some efforts were made to establish “enclave” communities (*li*) – territorial units within one county that belonged to another. In other cases, taxes were raised from the tenants. The 1580–81 survey was in part carried out to investigate this problem caused by absentee

482 Except in very exceptional circumstances, *chi-chuang-hu* imply tenants, of course; both were not widely present in the early Ming. Tax collection via tenants became a new development in the late Ming, but was not too common. Cf. Kawakatsu, *Chügoku hōken kokka*, p. 213.

483 An example of this latter method was practiced between P’an-yü, Nan-hai, Shun-te, and Hsin-hui counties in Kwangtung, see Kawakatsu, *Chügoku hōken kokka*, pp. 220–24.

484 If they were gentry landlords, the problem was almost similar to commendation; in both cases, corvée labor available to the community became less, but in case of *chi-chuang-hu*, tax payments might also suffer. For example, in Chi-hsi (in Hui-chou prefecture) *chi-chuang-hu* had 12 percent of the land, in Hsü-i (near Huai-an, in Kiangsu) 15.8 percent, in Chiang-p’u (opposite Nanking) 4 percent, in Yung-ch’ün (in Ch’üan-chou prefecture, Chekiang) 2.5 percent, in Shun-te 0.7 percent, in Weinan (near Hsi-an) 5.5 percent, and in Pao-ting (Ho-pei) 3 percent. See table 3/1 in Kawakatsu, *Chügoku hōken kokka*, pp. 214–15; for its importance, also pp. 181–2, n. 114.

485 During the Hung-wu and Yung-le periods, mainly Nan-hai was affected, but from the mid-fifteenth century onward, many projects were also inaugurated in P’an-yü, Tung-kuan and Hsin-hui. In late Ming times, they spread to Shun-te and Hsiang-shan.

landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*), although the very nature of the problem made it difficult for the survey to succeed.⁴⁸⁶

The exchange of taxes and rent between the so-called “old households” (*lao-hu*) on tax registers paralleled the exchange of taxes between different communities (*li*) or counties. Carrying out this exchange was one typical south-eastern form of tax farming (*pao-lan*).⁴⁸⁷ *Lao-hu* was the term used for a household name that had not been updated on the tax registers since the beginning of Ming dynasty or slightly later. This household name represented a lineage that paid all the taxes due for the lineage in that locale under that name. On occasion, taxes were paid under that name for some other households which had been attached to it for the sake of convenience.⁴⁸⁸ If land exchanges changed the original landholdings, and, therefore, the taxes of such a lineage, clearing settlements took place between the lineages that were parties to the exchange on an unofficial level, but the tax registers were not altered.⁴⁸⁹

Cries to limit the legal benefits of the absentee landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*) were increasingly raised. As early as 1534 in Chiang-yin, Chiang-nan, there were attempts to abolish these benefits. In the North, extra taxes were assessed on absentee landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*).⁴⁹⁰ Although the landlords passed the taxes on as much as possible to their tenants through increased rents, the land prices dropped. This made the land attractive for purchase by tax-exempt urban degree holders. One problem was thus replaced by another.⁴⁹¹

486 For the above, see Matsuda Yoshirō, “Minmatsu Shinsho Kanton Shukō deruta no saden kaihatsu to kyōshin shihai no keisei katei,” *Shakai keizai shigaku*, 46, No. 6 (March 1981), pp. 55–81.

487 *Pao-lan*, which is tax farming through a (perhaps forced) agreement between the taxpayers and a tax farmer, is to be distinguished from *pao-shou*, which is an agreement between the magistrate and the tax farmer. See Wang Yeh-chien, *Land taxation in Imperial China, 1750–1911* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973). The two could be similar, of course, when the state began to acknowledge already existing tax farming, as was the case with the *ni-t'ou* (see above). Mostly the state opposed tax farming, because it resulted in extra burdens for the population. Other types of *pao-lan* could be tax farming by clerks, low degree holders who abused their privileges, but were not arrested, tax prompters, supervisors of tax prompters, and also, not well investigated, rice brokers and merchants who managed rice storage granaries and who since mid-Ming times had, in some cases, been held responsible for the delivery of taxes. See Nishimura Genshō, “Shinsho no hōran – shichō taisei no kakuritsu, kaikin kara ukeoi chōzeisei,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 35, No. 3 (December 1976), pp. 114–74.

488 See Matsuda, “Minmatsu Shinsho Kanton Shukō deruta.”

489 In some cases, there was a kind of multiple landownership system in the background, the *lao-hu* (old household) being the one responsible for taxes without exactly being the landowner. The system might be one of the forerunners of the rent bursaries, *tsu-chan*, described by Muramatsu Yūji, *Kindai Kōnan no sosan – Chūgoku jinushi seido no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1970). Many rent books are also analyzed in Kawakatsu, *Min-Shin Kōnan nōgyō keizai shi*.

490 Note, for example, in Yüan-shih (near modern Shih-chia-chuang), during the Ch'ung-chen period. See Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku bōken kokka*, p. 216.

491 For example, in Shang-yüan (a county with its seat in Nanking), during the Wan-li period; see Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku bōken kokka*, p. 211.

The absentee landlord (*chi-chuang-hu*) and the practice of the commendation of land to those with exemptions had made the old quotas on the books rather irrelevant, while the practices of tax-farming and multiple landownership had resulted in households having to bear tax obligations for land that had long since been sold. As a result, arrearages in tax payments frequently occurred, since it was difficult for the remaining taxable land to make up the taxes on lands that were exempted from taxation. The sixteenth-century reforms that culminated in the Chang Chü-cheng survey were intended to remedy this particular situation by using the *mu* conversion (*che-mu*) method explained above to reallocate earlier quotas, and to ensure *liang-sui-t'ien-chuan* (the transfer of tax obligations concurrently with the transfer of title to the land). In addition, since landowners could live in other counties or cities, local officials could not address them; they could only address their tenants if they wanted the taxes to be paid and the corvée labor and payments to be accounted for.⁴⁹²

The surveys were often made in response to local requests, especially those from elders or resident wealthy commoners⁴⁹³ who felt that the increases in corvée assessments were unjust. One can therefore say that the surveys were undertaken for local socio-economic purposes as well as to remedy the financial situation of the state: the two objectives were one and the same.⁴⁹⁴

492 Some authors, notably Shigeta Atsushi, have pointed out that the state in the early Ch'ing for the first time made rent arrearage a punishable crime and that corvée labor became fully assessed on landholdings. See Shigeta Atsushi, "Shinchō nōmin shihai no rekishiteki tokushitsu – chiteigin seiritsu no imi suru mono," in *Zenkeindai Aija no hō to shakai*, Vol. 1, ed. Niida Noboru hakushi tsuitō kinen ronbunshū henshū iinkai, Niida Noboru hakushi tsuitō kinen ronbunshū (Tokyo, 1967), rpt. in Shigeta Atsushi, *Shindai shakai keizaishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1975), pp. 98–122; and Shigeta Atsushi, "Ichijō benpō to chiteigin to no aida," *Jinbun kenkyū*, 18, No. 3 (March 1967), rpt. in his *Shindai shakai keizaishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1975), pp. 122–37. Therefore, they argue, the state became less powerful, relinquished its claims and power over (the labor corvée payable by) tenants, and completely relied upon and backed the landowners. It is more useful to say that de facto the state increasingly had tenants pay the taxes for their landlords (deductible from their rent payments) and that therefore the state placed itself between landlords and tenants, becoming more rather than less powerful, and that enforcement of rent payments by the state is just one expression of the increased local importance of the state. To what extent labor corvée, in fact, had ever been required from tenants is also uncertain. Cf. Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka*, p. 293, n. 73.

493 Some morally inclined gentry members also set up *i-t'ien* (charity land) in order to make up for loss of income from *chi-chuang-hu* and commendation practices. Since these lands were then made tax exempt by the magistrate and their tax assessments redistributed elsewhere, this was a totally irrational practice even if it sounded highly moral and Confucian. Consequently, such lands generally did not survive very long. See Hamashima, *Mindai Kōnan nōson shakai*, ch. 4.

494 I follow here Kawakatsu again rather than Nishimura, who sees a difference between the Chia-ching surveys and Chang Chü-cheng's; also, I do not believe in Nishimura's assertion that the new surveys reinforced the landlords' power, through incorporating, and therefore acknowledging on the books the landlord-tenant relationship. There never had been a denial of this relationship, and, in fact, for many aspects of the new surveys, both tenant and landlord had to agree on the numbers. See the discussion that follows note 78 above.

One very interesting and illuminating case study is the so-called enclaves (*ch'ien-t'ien*) controversy between Chia-hsing, Hsiu-shui, and Chia-shan counties in Chia-hsing prefecture, Chekiang, which dragged on for several centuries.⁴⁹⁵ The origin of the controversy was the creation of the two new counties (*hsien*) of Hsiu-shui and Chia-shan out of Chia-hsing county in 1430. These new counties were created on the basis of the administrative community (*li-chia*) system that was still organized at that time on the basis of a group of households. Since quotas differed, tax rates also differed among the three counties, with the rates being the lowest in Chia-hsing and the highest in Chia-shan. Since Chia-shan had not originally been the county capital, but had only been a marketplace, landlords were much less wealthy there and much land there was owned by households in the original county city that was now the location of the yamen of both other counties.⁴⁹⁶ The case of these three counties (*hsien*) is therefore a classic example of the problems attendant upon the presence of absentee landlords (*chi-chuang-hu*). Taxes were collected within each county for all of its territory and accounts were cleared between the counties. However, clearing accounts between the counties required that the problem of the differing rates between counties be reconciled; that is, at what rate should an enclave taxed by one county, but situated in another county, pay taxes: at the rate of the county in which it was situated or at the rate of the county that was to receive the taxes?⁴⁹⁷

The single most important development in the period between 1570 and 1660 was the beginning of the *chün-t'ien* and *chün-i* (equalized-land-equalized-corrée) reforms, which set the stage for the Ch'ing rural regime for centuries to come. Partly evolving from the single-whip reforms, these reforms were the third stage of Ming socio-political rural development. From a community based administrative community (*li-chia*) structure, through the "equal-land-neighborhood (*chia*)" structure under which regular corvée was still partly preserved, the time had now come for a complete abolition of all labor corvée, for the limitation and even the abolition of the exemptions of degree holders, for the government takeover of tax collection and delivery without the use of intervening community heads (*li-chang*), and for the actual abolition of the administrative community (*li*) and neighborhood (*chia*) units in favor of countywide tax units.

495 See esp. Kawakatsu, *Chügoku boken kokka*, cha. 9.

496 193 *ch'ing* in Chia-shan was owned by Hsiu-shui landlords (twenty-seven *ch'ing* for the reverse), and 120 by Chia-hsing landlords (seven *ch'ing* for the reverse.) Figures differ in some accounts, reflecting the different positions the gazetteers of these three counties took in relation to what they considered the "original" quota. The battle was harsh even in the gazetteers!

497 For another example of such problems, in which tax-exempt households were not always the only ones involved, see Kim Chong-bak, "Ming-tai li-chia-chih," pp. 186–87.

The first plans for an equalized land (*chün-t'ien*) system⁴⁹⁸ were begun in 1561, but too much commendation of land to those who were tax or corvée exempt made the system impossible to implement without land surveys. The first real implementation of an equalized-land and equalized-corrée (*chün-t'ien-chün-i*) system can be said to date from 1581 in Hai-yen county near the Hang-chou bay. In 1601, this system also began to be used by several other counties.⁴⁹⁹ In these reforms, even the regular corvée duties, which hitherto had remained unaltered by reforms, were assessed in money and redistributed. Basically, the payment for one community head (*li-chang*) was now assessed directly on a particular number of *mu*, often around 250 (this was the size of a neighborhood [*chia*], which by now was treated as a unit of land). The amount of taxable land on which a neighborhood (*chia*) was liable to pay tax was determined by deducting tax-exempt land from the total land that otherwise would have been taxable and dividing the amount of taxable land that resulted from this computation by the statutory number of community heads (*li-chang*) for the area. During the next ten years, it was stipulated that the amount of exempted land was not to be increased. Later, this amount of exempted land was made an upper-limit quota. At that point, the arrival of additional degree holders in an area only meant that the average exemption all degree holders in that locale received was reduced.

Care was taken to ensure that it would be impossible to set up several households in order to split up one's landholdings and thereby avoid high assessment categories of corvée (a practice called *bua-fen*); and quotas for the amount of exempted land that would be allowed in a given locale were set.⁵⁰⁰ A problem still remained: even if the now purely administrative communities (*li*) were averaged so that each *li* within a county would provide in principle the same number and kind of corvée and tax duties that every other *li* in that county did (this also holding true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the administrative neighbourhoods *chia*), the actual corvée burden was not the same everywhere. For example, the burden of tax grain transport would be heavier for a *li* located farther away from the county seat. It was therefore a

498 The term should not be confused with the slogans of some peasant rebellions that demanded land redistribution; mainland Chinese authors in particular have made this mistake.

499 For example, Chia-shan, P'ing-hu, Wu-ch'eng (seat in Hu-chou), and Ch'ung-te counties. There are earlier less sweeping cases in which the onerous *li-chang* duties were equated with a particular amount of land: for example, Yün-ho county in 1522, or Jui-an county in 1522. Both counties are in Che-chiang. See Kim Chong-bak, "Ming-tai li-chia-chih," p. 218.

500 Exempted land then comprised 22.3 percent of the total registered land in Hai-yen.

logical step to hire men to perform the duties and to have deliveries supervised by the local yamen itself.⁵⁰¹

It might be beneficial to review here the great changes the neighbourhood (*chia*) had undergone since the early Ming. Originally, the meaning of neighborhood (*chia*) had been both a grouping of a compact area of landholdings and a group of some ten neighboring households. This changed in the direction of a neighborhood (*chia*) that was, in fact, a grouping of landholdings that belonged to the descendants of the original households and which might still be listed under the original households' names. Later population and ownership changes resulted in the situation wherein the landholdings in a neighborhood (*chia*) may have been neither a compact area of landholdings belonging to members of the neighborhood (*chia*) who had come to live apart, nor a group of dispersed landholdings the owners of which lived near each other. A neighborhood (*chia*) might have no members anymore, or it might, on the other hand, encompass entire lineages. After the latest Ming reforms, an equalized neighborhood (*chia*) became a unit of land of rather consistent size that was preferably, but not necessarily, made up of landholdings that were completely contiguous, although these landholdings might belong to a varying number of households that did not necessarily live near each other.

Even the "equal-size neighborhood" (*chia*) was not based upon a territorial location as such. Although often called a "land-neighborhood" (*chia*), it actually remained a grouping of households that, taken together, owned an amount of land roughly equal to the amount owned by other neighborhood (*chia*) groups, and that was preferably compact. A large landowner could even "be" several neighborhoods (*chia*). While the amount of land in a neighborhood (*chia*), not the number of households, was now supposed to remain constant, land exchanges between households still eventually gave rise to the problems inherent in making up groupings from households possibly owning land parcels that were spread over several locales.

Other new reforms were also tried. One separated the land held by degree holders into "officials' *t'u*"⁵⁰² (*kuan-t'u*), where officials themselves were "allowed" to collect tax payments and those corvée payments that remained. Yet other reforms abolished corvée exemptions and allowed degree holders only the remaining privilege of making the corvée payment in silver (*t'ieh-jin*, "subsidy silver") rather than performing the labor in person, for to have

501 In these reforms, the rich in the cities and the poor in the villages were also now assessed in some degree to alleviate the burden on the resident middle landlords. One of the results was increasing possibilities for wealthy rural farmers.

502 *T'u* being an alternative name for *li*.

to perform corvée labor in person was considered demeaning.⁵⁰³ Peasants on the middle economic level must have benefited from this conversion when ways were found to distribute the corvée and tax burden to urban inhabitants who owned no land as well. The post of neighborhood head (*chia-shou*) disappeared without a trace.

In 1640, under Chin Chih-chün (1593–1670),⁵⁰⁴ the last of the corvée items, such as the *pu-chieh* (cloth deliverance) and *pei-pai-liang* (white rice for the North), were converted into silver. These were the last corvée items to be replaced because they were the most onerous and, therefore, the most difficult to replace. These measures continued to spread during the early Ch'ing.⁵⁰⁵

Some authors, especially Western writers, have seen the tension between local versus central management as the major characteristic of late Ming society. Insofar as we limit ourselves to examining the political and social thought of the more morally inclined members of the gentry, that assessment seems true. But it bears repeating that most gentry leaders were arguing for control over their locality or county for their own benefit, not for the commonwealth or for the general benefit of the public. This is clear with regard to the reforms concerning irrigation discussed above, with regard to tax collection, and with regard to tax exemptions. Initiatives for reform often came from poor or wealthy local commoners, and the magistrates and prefects

503 Some gentry advocated this *t'ieh-yin* only for the land in excess of the exempted land; other gentry members such as Kao P'an-lung (1562–1626), the famous Tung-lin organizer, proposed that the gentry also pay *t'ieh-yin* for their exempted land, and perform actual corvée for the remainder. See the DMB, pp. 701–10.

504 See his biography in Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 160–61, where these endeavors, however, are not mentioned.

505 The proposals of K'o Sung in Chia-shan (1661) are often seen as a great Ch'ing effort to end gentry malpractices (he proposed them to the court when he was supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny in the Ministry of Revenue); they do not contain anything new, and insofar as they put limitations on gentry privileges, are a step backward from the more progressive Ming reforms; they derive their fame from the fact that they were officially adopted by the new, suspicious, central government. The existence in the late Ming of equal-size *li* seems to have been mainly limited to Chekiang at first; but measures against the privileges of degree holders and *chi-chuang-hu* were undertaken more widely. The equal-land-*chia* system, sometimes taking place within an older *li*, but more often countywide, continued until the 1727 nationwide movement to “arrange *li* according to the settlement” (*shun-chuang-pian-li*). This movement is again one of those instances in which Ch'ing practices have been considered as innovative when, in fact, they were not: often the name *chuang* (settlement) was given to whatever had been in place: sometimes a pre-existing equal-land-*li*; and sometimes a pre-existing equal-land *chia*. The new *chuang* was only sometimes a real settlement which was close to an original Ming *li* or *chia* configuration because changes in landownership had been relatively unimportant. Moreover, it was, by and large, just one step in the periodic efforts to adjust the tax records to the changes that had taken place since the last effort, as was the case in Ming times; and even if a more rational realignment temporarily obtained, changes in land ownership would again cause a separation of household units and land units, for this “reform,” like its Ming counterparts, did not include any regulations for regular updating. There was certainly no new major Ch'ing improvement, as some have maintained. See Kawakatsu, *Chūgoku hōken kokka*, ch. 10.

often chose to side with them against the gentry, whom the magistrates thought were selfishly pursuing their own interests. Some bachelors (*sheng-yüan*) were active among those members of the gentry who supported the much-needed reforms, partly because they felt closer to the commoners and partly because they felt very strongly that in the long run the reforms would be more profitable for them as well, since they had no hope of producing degree holders in their families in every generation.⁵⁰⁶ The very first leading figures to support these popular demands were without doubt exceptional: in 1581, the famous bibliophile Wang Wen-lu (1503–86), who belonged to one of the leading families in Hai-yen, unequivocally stated that he dared to confront the other local gentry only “because I have no children, so they cannot hurt my family.”⁵⁰⁷ But the increase in local unrest and the growing influence and prestige of such reform-minded groups as the Tung-lin group caused at least some members of the upper gentry everywhere to support the reforms as good causes. Finally, the Ch’ing overthrow and conquest of the Ming dynasty alarmed all the gentry to such an extent that they realized support for the newer reforms and the partial relinquishment of their privileges, already evidenced by some gentry members in 1581, was necessary to preserve their own position under the new dynasty as well.

CONCLUSION

There are influential scholars who view the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 as the direct consequence of the Ming government’s incapacity to adapt its tax and other revenue raising structures to changing economic, social, and political conditions. In their view, because the rules laid down by Chu Yüan-chang, the founder of the dynasty, could not be tampered with, their increasing inappropriateness to current conditions notwithstanding, political inertia and reverence for the “established practices of the ancestors” (*tsu tsung ch’eng fa*) paralyzed the state: the outcome was inevitable – the Ming had to fall. For other scholars, the causes of the Ming dynasty’s failure to resist the Manchu conquest were its inability or unwillingness to delegate more authority to the new local “gentry” elite, and the dynasty’s centralized, autocratic style of rule.

Both influential views, I hope, will seem less convincing in light of the foregoing chapter. In fact, local initiatives to adapt to changing circumstances were extraordinarily frequent and fruitful during the Ming. Some of these

506 *Li* sometimes took revenge on families that had abused their privileges as soon as the degree holder, and with him, his privileges, had died. See Okuzaki, *Chügoku kyōshin jinushi*.

507 There is a biography in *DMB*, pp. 1449–51; his involvement in the Hai-yen reforms is outlined in detail in Hamashima, *Meidai Kōnan nōson shakai*, pp. 449–66.

reforms were carried out on the county level, others were implemented on a provincial level; but all of them had official approval and support. There is precious little evidence to uphold the contention that the Ming political structure was intrinsically unable to modify, rescind, or reinterpret the laws promulgated by Chu Yüan-chang.

These far-reaching changes were, however, described in a canonical style of discourse much less susceptible to change. Such terms as *li* or *chia* remained standard throughout the dynasty and, for that matter, well into the Ch'ing period, even if a *li* in 1640 Hai-yen was radically different from a *li* there in 1400. The population and land data to be reported to the central government changed at a glacial pace, but the reality they referred to was in a state of constant flux. Through different conversion rates and a great variety of other measures, many ways were found to make the collection of taxes and corvée simple and more equitable. The central government was satisfied with the older reporting categories and, in that sense, there was on the highest level a certain political inertia. However, this does not invalidate the fact that locally many varied adaptations existed to bring such older and outdated categories and rates in line with current local conditions.

Many of these reforms involved reworking the land and population data compiled by and for the government to generate different apportionments of the tax and corvée quotas. Simply put, no pre-modern government can be faulted for not being able to keep such records current and reliable; wherever land exchanges are frequent and legal, and people cannot be stopped from moving, after a few decades no compiled data will accurately reflect reality. This certainly was the case during the Ming dynasty when the population grew at a rate at least equal to that of the Ch'ing.

Other scholars have underscored the general unreliability of the Ming (or any other dynasty's) data compiled for revenue collection; I would like to stress, however, that this does not make the data unimportant. Local officials had to use the original tax categories and quotas in their reports to the central government. The most interesting glimpses into actual conditions can be had by investigating exactly how the "actual" conditions were tailored to fit into the categories and quotas used in the reports. That was the context in which social and economic developments took place in various ways: some sanctioned, and some prohibited, by the state. That was the context in which lineages, tax farming, local bullying, multiple land ownership, differentiated land prices, gentry land ownership, and variable rates of money conversion, to name just a few examples, all developed. There were always loopholes in this two-tiered tax structure that provided opportunities for tax evasion, loopholes waiting to be plugged by well-intentioned officials and, increasingly and paradoxically, righteously indignant degree holders.

Three-quarters of the population may not have been on the government's tax rolls, but that did not necessarily mean that they did not pay any taxes. The government's data were technically inaccurate, but they remained the figures used to calculate ongoing reapportionments and reallocations of the tax base, and hence remained worth fighting over.

Of course, there were periodic attempts to update such information on the local level and to bring it into line with current population and land data. This was especially necessary for communal defense and religious organizations that needed the cooperation of the whole population; such data were not meant to be reported to the government. In the attempts to replace outdated data with the current ones, there is less difference between such terms as *pao-chia*, *hsiang-yüeh*, and *li-chia* than is often imagined even if their goals, the impulse behind their organization, as well as the social stratum from which they drew their leaders could all be different. Nevertheless, we are not confronted with a dichotomy between a real-life community and an artificial tax grouping, as is sometimes stated. I see instead the different organizations instituted under the Ming as part of an ongoing process, beginning in the Sung and continuing until the Republican period, characterized by periodic attempts to organize actual settlements into one cohesive structure encompassing community, tax, and defense functions by recompiling and reorganizing tax and population records. The imagined bases of such institutions were idealized unchanging villages of close neighbors owning a compact territory of fields. Such attempts failed or succeeded depending on whether they were perceived as necessary or suitable to local conditions. It was the local situation that decided the outcome, not the terminology used to describe the attempts in statutes or regulations. In some cases, therefore, real functioning communities and their leaders were simply renamed according to the nomenclature of the new proposals (a Yüan *she* would become a Ming *li*, a fifteenth century *ta-hu*, or a sixteenth-century *kuei-t'ou*). In other cases, the older nomenclature was retained, while actual community members and leaders were replaced and could include immigrants excluded before. In some cases and for various reasons, there were places where no proposal was ever put into practice as intended. I do not see any great change in this organizational pattern during the late imperial period. Information about the socio-economic developments that took place should, therefore, not be sought in the central government's statutes, rules, and regulations about these organizations, but in the memorials to the throne, in local gazetteers, and in family genealogies where the new proposals were outlined and, even more important, where the problems facing such organizations were explained and their origins described.

In this chapter, I have stressed the increased social and economic importance of the county (*hsien*) level during the late Ming. In many regions, the basic unit of account in the yamen budget became the entire county rather than lower level *li*. In principle, the wide variety of assessments per *mu* or per *ting* was replaced by rates common throughout the whole county. The growing pool of local degree holders aligned themselves on a countywide basis as well, since the civil service examinations also took the county as the basis for distributing quotas. Degree holders, as well, united to protect their tax exemptions and to promote or oppose reforms on a countywide basis, since they now also shared identical conditions throughout any given county in this respect too. The great increase in the numbers of degree holders meant that they could actually organize their own social network on the county level. They consequently became less involved in the administration of their rural villages. It was this privileged class that jealously protested when tax reforms did away with their own tax exempt status and their counties' advantages, and it was this group that obstructed attempts to coordinate the implementation of different measures and institutional reforms on higher levels. It is difficult to find in this group potential saviors of the Ming dynasty, when in fact its members impeded virtually every attempt to mobilize more resources for defense against the Manchus. Prompted by rent resistance movements and their own moral convictions, some did get involved in the tax equalization movement; but most did not. It is not then the case that the Ch'ing tax structure and fiscal reforms were superior to those of the Ming; the Manchu reliance on violence, fear, and intimidation created the conditions under which the implementation of the late Ming reforms could be enforced on a wider scale than before. The Ch'ing socio-economic structure thus does not represent a break with the Ming structure; it is the continuation of it.

CHAPTER 10

COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMERCE

The experience of life in China changed remarkably over three centuries of Ming rule. That, at least, is how it seemed to those who lived through the changes and felt obliged to record their surprise and dismay. By the middle of the dynasty, many literate observers were becoming aware that the institutions laid down by the founding Emperor, Hung-wu, were no longer guiding social practices. They credited this lapse variously to the recurrent problems of lax administration, low-level corruption, and a weakening of moral fibre. Writers of the late Ming knew differently. In their view, something more than just dynastic sag had taken hold. Many became obsessed with the extent to which Chinese society had grown away from what they were trained to believe it had originally been: an agrarian realm where superiors knew their responsibilities and inferiors their places. But, they felt, people no longer stayed put: class distinctions had become confusingly fluid; the cultivation of wealth had displaced moral effort as the presiding goal of the age.

The panicked indignation that can be found in writings of the late Ming may not represent the mood that all of that age shared, nor may it speak directly of the actual pressures to which an embattled elite felt vulnerable. But it came close. Some late-Ming writers, for instance, were aware that China was becoming a more crowded place than it had been at the beginning of the Ming, but only the more alarmist insisted that the population had more than doubled between the Hung-wu emperor's reign and the turn of the seventeenth century – as in fact it had. Others were sensitive to the difficulty that cultivators were having in gaining access to enough land to survive, but only a few were aware of the migration that had shifted China's population westward over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and they tended not to grasp the scale of this movement. All understood that merchants in great numbers were criss-crossing the country, but almost none could recognize the extent to which commerce had come to dominate production and tie formerly separated regional economies together. What they could see, and rightly so, was that a mobility of persons, statuses, and things had replaced the stable order pictured in the instructions of the Hung-wu emperor. This mobility grew from two roots: a large and expanding transpor-

tation and communications network that was bringing every part of the country into potential communication with every other part, and an even more rapidly expanding commercial economy that realized this potential.

The commercialization of Ming society within the context of expanding communications may be regarded as a distinguishing aspect of the history of this dynasty. In the matter of commodity production and circulation, the Ming marked a turning point in Chinese history, both in the scale at which goods were being produced for the market, and in the nature of the economic relations that governed commercial exchange. The improvements in transportation brought about by the Ming state and by individuals or groups were not of the same order; even so, the expansion of the state courier system and the reconstruction of the Grand Canal, plus the cumulative effect of mundane investments in canals and roads, were grand enough to contribute significantly to the movement of goods and people, and thus to facilitate the elaboration of commercial networks. In none of these developments did the Ming represent a break with past developments. The cumulative investment in infrastructures and practices inherited from the Sung and Yüan dynasties provided a substantial foundation on which to develop new institutions and economic relations. Developments in the Ming contributed to a considerable remaking of the social environment that, then and subsequently, shaped the lives of Chinese people.

The Ming state played a large, and often unwitting, part in this remaking. Hung-wu's restoration of agricultural production in the first instance propelled the economy toward the production of a surplus that had to be traded. His unwillingness to overly regulate merchants and markets meant that these actors and institutions were relatively free to handle the trade, and to handle it in increasing volumes. Hung-wu's revitalization of the courier systems encouraged magistrates to sponsor the building of canals, roads, ferries, and bridges throughout the realm. His demand for large levies of grain and other items needed for constructing the new capital in Nanking and for maintaining the defense of the northern border, coupled with his concern for legislating every aspect of the lives of his people and carefully monitoring the work of his officials, meant that the state transport and courier systems were in constant use, and the pressures for maintaining the transportation infrastructure unrelenting. The Yung-lo emperor's decision to move the primary capital from Nanking to Peking imposed such a transportation and communications burden that it led to the opening up of avenues between north and south, most conspicuously the Grand Canal. In subsequent reigns, the shift in fiscal assessment from discrete payments in labor and kind to unified payments in cash, generically embraced by the term *single-whip*, moved the operation of state communications away from the ancient agrarian model of

corvée in the direction of a more commercial model of hired labor. At the same time, the monetization of the tax system induced more silver to enter the economy and to circulate at greater speed, thereby contributing to the conversion of goods into commodities and making it possible, and more economically rational, for a household to buy what it needed, rather than to grow it or to make it.

Although the policies of the Ming state were important influences shaping the expansion of communications and commerce in the Ming, what the state did does not provide a complete account. These policies led to the formation of a more mobile and more commercially active world only to the extent that they were met with responses. For example, while the state's communications network may have determined where most bridges were built in the Ming, they were built largely through private subscriptions. Funds could be raised only when the bridges provided other, more local advantages to the donors, which they did by facilitating the movement of people or goods material to their welfare. To offer another example, state stimulation of agricultural production encouraged trade to the extent that merchants saw the relative advantages of local factor endowments and encouraged regional specializations in agricultural and handicraft production. With greater trading, marketing hierarchies ramified around administrative seats as well as around the new market towns springing up through the Ming. The profit to be made in commodity trading encouraged some merchants to speculate in overseas trade, creating, through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a considerable foreign market for Chinese textiles, porcelains, and processed industrial crops purchased with silver. The import of silver not only facilitated the conversion of tax levies to silver payments, but, both on its own and in conjunction with the single-whip reforms, heated the commercial economy.

The social impact of these changes was as striking as the changes themselves. However artificial the classical status hierarchy of gentry, peasantry, artisanate, and merchants may have seemed in the opening years of the dynasty, by the end of the Ming it was nothing but a quaint trope invoked by a few censorious gentry authors to mourn the erosion of what they deemed to be their near-hereditary claim to elevated status. The plaint may have reflected truly the distress of some within the gentry, but it rings falsely when one takes account of the increasing dependence of gentry income (derived from commercialized land rents and control over the marketing of rent-based surplus) on the commercial economy that was lifting merchants to second place in the social hierarchy. By the late Ming, many a gentleman could look back into his lineage past – and sometimes around him in his lineage present – and find that commercial success had underwritten (and was still paying for) his entry into elite society. The social barrier between gentry

and merchants would not become insignificant until the Ch'ing dynasty; but the process of strengthening the gentry's agrarian base with commercial wealth was well underway by the time the Ming came to an end. The mobility of commerce made social mobility unavoidable.

STATE SYSTEMS OF COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION

State communication and transportation systems constituted the basic pathways of communications in the Ming dynasty. The importance of the state in the structure of communications in the Ming stemmed from its concern that it be able to mobilize – quite literally, to put into motion – whatever resources it needed (taxes, soldiers, supplies, administrators, etc.), and to do so whenever it needed them. A state is a spatial entity: only when it has adequate means of extending its presence and resources to all areas within its jurisdiction can it guarantee its survival. The state was the largest single investor in transportation and communications facilities in the Ming; it was also the only investor that could coordinate its investments above the local *levée*, though it did so only in exceptional cases. All other communications thus tended to work within or between the channels laid by the state. The Ming operated three main systems: the courier service, the postal service, and the transport service. Administratively distinct, they nonetheless tended to function in concert to maintain adequately the flow of information, income, and personnel on which the state relied.

The courier service

The courier service (*i-ch'uan*) was designed to move communications, administrators, and foreign visitors traveling on official business within China. It was serviced by 1,936 courier stations that were established at a distance, one from the next, of 60–80 *li* (35–40 km): the stage that an official was expected to cover in a day's travel. (The number of stations would be reduced to almost half this number by the early Wan-li era.¹) The routes constituted a network of official routes radiating outward, first from Nanking, and after the capital was transferred there, from Peking as well. These courier routes defined the major routes of the Ming dynasty and served as the skeleton around which proliferated the national transportation network. For this rea-

1 The number of courier stations in the 1580s was 1,036, according to Su T'ung-ping, *Ming-tai i-ti chih-tu* (Taipei, 1969), p. 15.

son, the courier routes usually appear first in every route guide or traveler's handbook of the late Ming.²

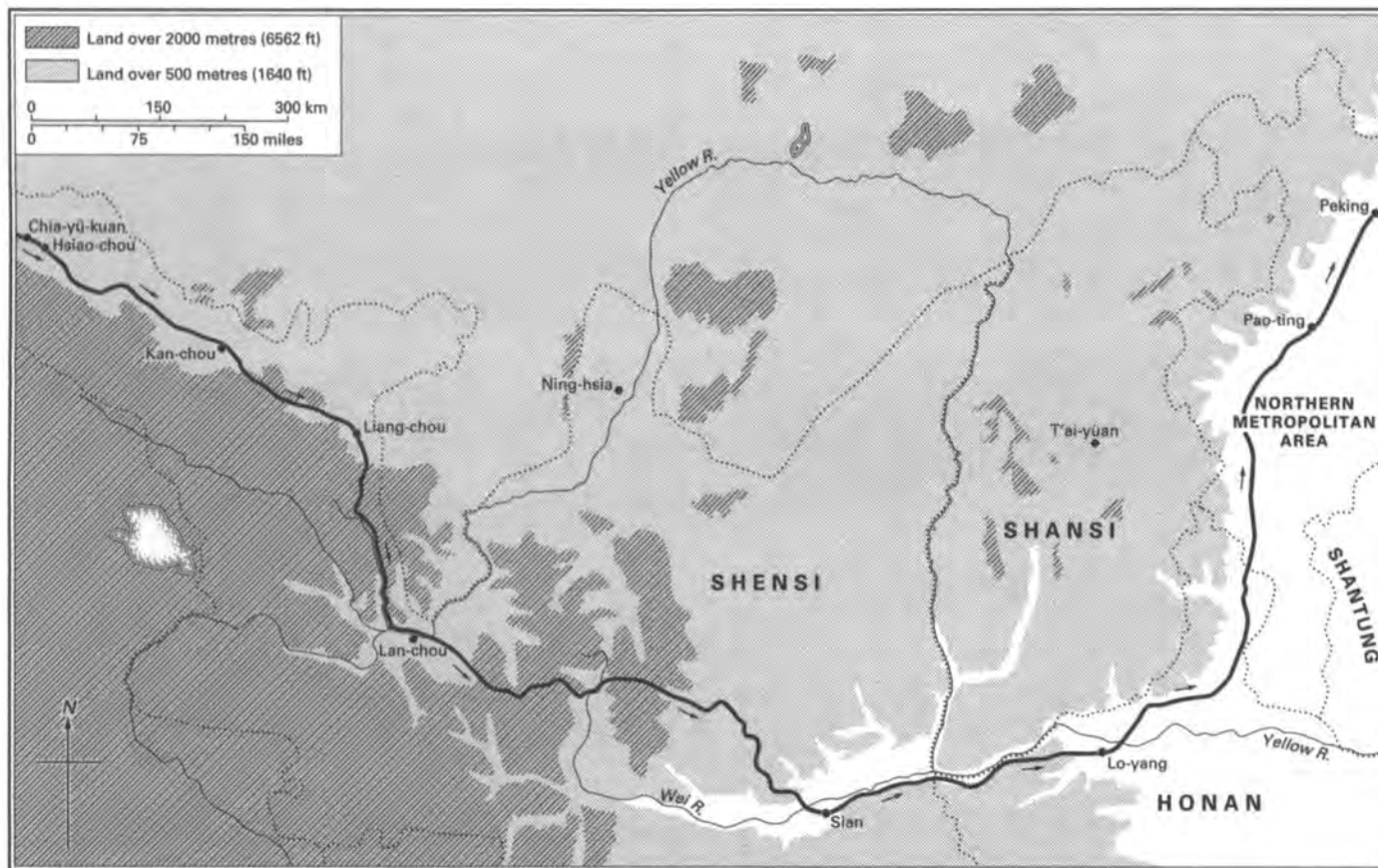
The transporting of foreigners, whose presence in China was at the pleasure of the emperor and whose travel arrangements and expenses were therefore covered by the state, was a minor burden for the courier system. Yet, as foreigners were often surprised and intrigued by what they saw in China, they often provide the sort of detailed descriptions of state transport facilities that one cannot find in Chinese records. We shall describe the service by considering the accounts of courier travel that appear in diaries kept by two foreign visitors, a Persian in 1420, and a Korean in 1488.

The first diary is of a Persian embassy that entered China through Chia-yü Kuan, the western-most gate of the Great Wall, in 1420 (and left by the same gate two years later after having their names checked against the original entry register). The embassy encountered its first courier station built into the west gate of Hsiao-chou, the first Chinese city 45 kilometers in from the Great Wall. From this point onward, the work of transporting and accommodating the Persians became the duty of the courier service. The official diarist of the embassy, Ghiyasud-Din Naqqah, was powerfully impressed with the resources that the courier service furnished. "Whatever requirements the envoys had as regards horses, food, drink, and bedding were all provided from the courier station. Every night as long as they were there, every one of them was given a couch, a suit of silken sleeping dress, together with a servant to attend to their needs." For their sustenance, each member of the party was given, "in the measure that had already been fixed according to the rank, mutton, geese, fowls, rice, flour, honey, beer [rice wine], wine, garlics and onions preserved in vinegar and different kinds of vegetables which had been pickled in vinegar, in addition to other requisites that had been appointed."³

The journey from Hsiao-chou to Peking took them through ninety-nine stations, spaced in average every 60–80 *li* (35–45 km), which was the distance one was expected to cover in a day. On the first leg of the journey through the sparsely populated territory down to Kan-chou (a published distance of 430 *li* or 250 km), the courier stations were spaced every 40 or 50 *li* (23–28 km) apart; later, as the embassy passed through Honan where travel was easier

2 E.g., the Peking- and Nanking-centered networks constitute the first two *chan* of Huang Pien's route book, *I-t'ung lu-ch'eng t'u-chi* (1570), rpt. as *T'ien-hsia shui-lu lu-ch'eng*, ed. Yang Cheng-t'ai (T'ai-yüan, 1992), pp. 1–60.

3 Hafiz Abru, *A Persian embassy to China*, trans. K. M. Maitra, with a new introduction by Carrington Goodrich (n.d.; rpt., New York, 1970). Abru was the official historian who entered the diary of Ghiyasud-Din Naqqah into the Persian court annals. The passages quoted may be found on pp. 27–28, 33–36, 43–44, 49. The distances have been taken from Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, pp. 23, 82–83, 127–32.



Map 10.1 Journey of the Persian embassy to China, 1420-22

and safer, and greater distances could be covered in a day, they were spaced at roughly twice that distance. Each of the stations in the northwest was ordered to produce 450 mounts (horses and mules) and 50 to 60 sedan-chairs for the Persian embassy. The diarist found sedan-chairs a novelty. The diarist comments with interest that the chair-bearers “fasten ropes to the vehicles and those very boys place them across their shoulders and pull them on. No matter whether it be raining or it be a mountainous region those boys pull the vehicles over their shoulders with force and convey them from one post-house [courier station] to another. Each vehicle is carried by twelve persons. The boys are all handsome with artificial Chinese pearls in their ears and their hair knotted on the crown of their head.” The Persian was also impressed with the speed with which the courier service conveyed his party forward. The escorts on horseback who galloped ahead to the next courier station traveled at a rate faster than the swiftest couriers in the Persian empire, he claimed.

The embassy took three and a half months to cover the ninety-nine stages from Chia-yü Kuan to Peking. According to the published distances, the route was 5,042 *li* (2,900 km) in length. The embassy’s daily rate of travel, averaged over the journey, was thus roughly 30 kilometers a day. After five months in the capital, the Persian embassy left Peking on 18 May 1421 and set off on their return. The diarist provides little information about their passage, noting only that on most days the party covered the distance between one courier station and the next. Once they were back up in the northwestern corner of Shensi, they were delayed two months in Kan-chou and another two in Hsiao-chou because Mongol raids made the roads unsafe. One of the few events that the diarist took the trouble of noting was that, at some location prior to reaching Lan-chou, they had their bags searched to check that they were not exporting any contraband goods, most particularly tea, which was the staple of the government trade for nomad horses.⁴ At last, on 13 January 1422, after some 6,000 kilometers of traveling through China, the Persians departed through Chia-yü Kuan.

Sixty-six years after the Persians departed, a party of forty-three Koreans shipwrecked on a relatively deserted stretch of the Chekiang coast was similarly conveyed by courier service to Peking. The head of this party, Ch’oe

4 Abru, *A Persian embassy to China*, pp. 118–19. The diary says the envoys’ bags were searched at P’ing-an. There was a Sung fort of that name on the road between Kan-chou and Hsiao-chou, but that location does not fit well into the diary’s chronology. The diarist records only that the embassy arrived at P’ing-an a month and a half after leaving Peking. Possibly P’ing-an was a mistranscription of Sian or its county name of Ch’ang-an.

Pu (1454–1504), wrote a detailed account of his experiences in China that pays particular attention to the business of travel.⁵ The Koreans were first taken to T'ao-chu Battalion, the center of coastal defense in the area. The battalion commander ordered one of his officers, Chai Yung, to escort the Korean party to the regional commander in Shao-hsing, from whence they were to be transferred first to the provincial capital in Hangchow, then up to Peking for repatriation back to Korea. The party set out on 6 March 1488. Ch'oe and his officers rode in eight sedan-chairs and the others walked. Following military communication roads, the party reached Pai-ch'iao Station in four days. Pai-ch'iao lay on the courier route up the coast to Ning-po prefecture. From this point the courier service handled their travel, though the keenness of some station masters to see them quickly on their way may indicate that the supplies and labor that courier stations in this part of China could raise were limited; a party of forty-three plus escort was a large group to accommodate. Unlike the road in from Chia-yü Barrier, where few other travel services were available, this courier route was not provisioned to handle large parties.

The Koreans pushed on that day until the second watch of the night in order to get to the next courier station at Hsi-tien, 60 *li* (35 km) north. High winds and heavy rains on 10 March made further progress impossible and the party remained at this heavily guarded station. Although the storm continued to blow the following day, Chai Yung insisted the party go forward regardless of the weather. "The laws of China are strict," he told Ch'oe. "If there is the slightest delay, it will bring punishment upon us. It is raining hard now, but we cannot stay longer." They covered 60 *li* (35 km) that day, and the next day reached Pei-tu River, just east of Ning-po. There they left their sedan-chairs behind and began the river journey that eventually would take them all the way to Peking. Officially, the Grand Canal began not there, but in Hangchow, but the network of waterways from Pei-tu west to Hangchow, broken by two short overland transfers between there and Shao-hsing, effectively extended the canal by another 465 *li* (270 km), making Ning-po the real southern terminus. Two days later they were in Shao-hsing, and two days after that in Hangchow. There, Chai Yung was flogged for having taken too long to get the Koreans from T'ao-chu Battalion to the provincial capital. Chai's fear of delay back at Hsi-tien Station had been well-placed.

On 23 March, the Hangchow prefectural government assigned Ch'oe's party a different escort and issued them with a document empowering them

5 John Meskill, *Ch'oe Pu's diary: a record of drifting across the sea* (Tucson, 1965). The passages quoted may be found on pp. 58, 66–69, 88, 111, 113, 135, 153–57. Distances have been calculated from Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, pp. 1–2, 100–01, and Tan-i-tzu, *T'ien-hsia lu-ch'eng t'u-yin* (early Ch'ing re-edition of *Shih-shang lei-yao*, rpt. ed. Yang Cheng-t'ai; T'ai-yüan, 1992), pp. 395–97, 484–85.



Map 10.2 Journey of Ch'oe Pu in Central China, 1488

to travel by the courier service. His escort was given an arrival deadline of 11 May, with threat of punishment should he fail to meet it. Ch'oe was told informally that the journey from Hangchow to Peking would take about forty days, though the deadline gave them forty-seven days in which to get to the capital. Deducting two days that were lost en route (one for a day's stopover to see Soochow, one because of bad weather), the party ended up spending forty-three days covering a distance officially rated at 3,621 *li* (2,090 km). They arrived in Peking on 9 May, just two days before their travel permit expired. They lodged at the Central Courier Hostel (*Hui-t'ung kuan*, or Hostel where all communications converge), which, along with the one in Nanking, served as one of the two central nodes in the national courier network. After a month in the capital, they were transferred northeast and crossed the Yalu River into Korea on 12 July.

Adding up the published distances between courier stations, the total length of the inland waterway connecting Ning-po to Peking was 4,064 *li* (2,340 km). Ch'oe's party covered that distance in forty-nine days of actual travel. The journey went most quickly across the flat plain of Pei Chihli, where they proceeded at a rate of 61 kilometers a day. Between Hangchow and Yangchow, their rate of travel was 49 kilometers a day. For the rest of the journey, they averaged a daily pace of between 43 and 44 kilometers. Compared with the 30 kilometers-a-day rate at which the Persian embassy's sedan-chairs moved, the Korean party clearly enjoyed an advantage by being able to travel in boats.

A distinction between land and water routes was built into the courier system, because they required different facilities and were used for different purposes. Land routes ran along what were called official roads (*kuan-lu*); water routes followed larger and better maintained watercourses. Stations accordingly were of two types, overland or horse stations (*ma-i*, *lu-i*), and river or water stations (*shui-i*); though in places where passage was difficult and required going by foot, courier stations could be designated as foot stations (*tsu-i*). Horse stations tended to handle couriers transmitting state correspondence or officials who had to move quickly, whereas water stations serviced official personnel on routine transfer.

The spacing of stations was supposed to be 60 *li* (35 km). Where the spacing was regular, an official could keep rough track of the distances he covered by counting the number of courier stations he passed.⁶ In many areas, however, the spacing of stations was not so uniform: they could be half that distance apart on land routes in sparsely inhabited border areas where security

6 See, for example, *Cb'iumg-chou fu-chib* (1619), 10b, p.7b.

was threatened, further apart on water routes and in well-traveled regions. To Ku Yen-wu, writing after the fall of the Ming, the dynasty's unwillingness to space courier stations as they had been in the Han, at 30-*li* intervals, was an unfortunate failing. "People of ancient times established numerous courier stations so they could travel quickly and without ruining the horses," Ku argued, "whereas people of later ages amalgamated them over time in order to save money, to the point that now there is only one station every 70 or 80 *li*, so that the horses have collapsed and the officers have taken off" because of the impossible strain.⁷

Courier routes did not connect every county seat but linked provincial and prefectural capitals. A prefecture thus tended to have slightly fewer courier stations than counties. Where travel was difficult, more could be in operation. For instance, Ch'ang-te prefecture in the hills west of Tung-t'ing Lake in Hu-kuang had only four counties but nine courier stations, the last of which was added in 1392.⁸ Most prefectures had many fewer. A county that was on a courier route and had a station was graded as "frequented" (*ch'ung*). One of four classifications of burdensome posts in the field administration, "frequented" meant onerous duties for the magistrate, who was charged with the responsibilities of keeping up the station, roads, and canals in his county, organizing the levy of labor and supplies needed, maintaining the number of horses at the official quota, and entertaining the parade of dignitaries who passed through.

Most courier stations and the routes they serviced predated the Ming, often having originated in the Sung or earlier, though the new state did expand some routes, and downgrade stations on some others, to make the transmission of messages and personnel more efficient.⁹ The service appears to have been put to heavier use in the early Ming than it was in the Yüan. Rather than set up new stations to handle the increased burden, the state's preference was to enlarge the service's resource base by corvéeing a larger segment of the population to maintain the stations and care for the horses. Where the number of stations did increase was in north China after the primary capital was moved to Peking: Ho-chien prefecture south of Peking saw the creation of five new courier stations between 1376 and 1415.¹⁰ Overall, though, the trend in the early Ming was to streamline the courier service by consolidating

7 Ku Yen-wu, *Jib-chib-lu tao-tu*, ed. Chao Li-sheng (Ch'eng-tu, 1992), p. 109.

8 Ch'en Hung-mo, *Ch'ang-te fu-chib* (1538), 4, pp. 14b-21b.

9 E.g., the courier route to Yunnan through Hu-kuang via Ch'ang-te prefecture, the so-called "east route," was suspended at the beginning of the Hung-wu era because horses could not cover the difficult terrain at good speed. One of the three stations in the Ch'ang-te county of Tz'u-li was closed down, and the two others downgraded to the status of post house; Ch'en Kuang-ch'ien, *Tz'u-li hsien-chib* (1574), 10, p. 12b.

10 P'an Shen, ed., *Ho-chien fu-chib* (1540), 4, pp. 10a-17b.

mostly at the expense of horse stations; further reductions followed later, leaving only thirty-four stations by the end of the dynasty.¹¹

For an even more extreme example, Hai-nan Island, which was the jurisdiction of one large prefecture, Ch'iung-chou, had no less than twenty-nine courier stations at the start of the Ming. This number, far above that of any other prefecture in the country, was the legacy of Sung times when Hai-nan Island was first being settled, but rationalization did not come until the mid-Ming: first, four were closed in the 1440s, then another in the 1490s, then a further eleven in 1506, and finally one more in 1522. This reduction left only twelve, many of which were spaced over 100 kilometers apart. Thirteen years after the 1522 closure, the prefect memorialized for that station to be reopening because traffic required its use, yet contraction prevailed in the long run: another station was closed in 1559, another four in 1568, and yet another in 1612. The compiler of the 1619 prefectural gazetteer could not help but comment that "with the closings of the Chia-ching and Lung-ch'ing eras, there were almost none left." On the other hand, it appears that the courier service was not under heavy use, for the compiler went on to observe that "Hai-nan is secluded on a distant stretch of coast and travelers are few." The anticipated benefit of reducing courier stations – saving costs and therefore keeping taxes from increasing – did not materialize, however, much to the compiler's annoyance. "The stations are gone but the service levy remains."¹² Through the mid- to late Ming, the courier service continued to contract. Some new courier stations were built or ungraded, and a few water stations were converted to horse stations. But most new investments in the courier service in the late Ming were restricted to border areas like western Shensi and Kweichow.

As couriers were soldiers involved in transmitting state documents that impinged directly on the security of the throne, they worked under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of War. The regulations governing the courier service are accordingly to be found in the chapters of the *Ming code* on military laws.¹³ For exceeding his time limit by a day, a courier was liable to a beating of twenty strokes, plus an additional stroke for every three days beyond that, to a maximum of sixty. This penalty structure suggests that a courier could be assigned a delivery involving up to 121 days of travel. The penalty was waived only when floods blocked the courier's route; it was lessened if the delayed document were improperly addressed – unless the courier himself had miswritten it (couriers were expected to have some degree of literacy).

11 Hsü Wang-fa, ed., *Chekiang kung-lu shih*, Vol. 1 (Peking, 1988), pp. 6–10.

12 *Ch'iung-chou fu-chih* (1619), 4, pp. 21b–46b; 5, pp. 62b–65a.

13 *TML*, 17, pp. 1a–26b.

The severity of these penalties was increased by 50 percent when the communications they handled involved military matters.¹⁴

In addition to conveying messages, the courier service handled people traveling on official business, so long as they held the appropriate travel documents. Officials were permitted to go by horse if they were in a hurry, but those on routine transfer went wherever possible by the less expensive means of government barge. An official who was retiring and returning home might be given permission to use the courier service as a special mark of imperial favor, but otherwise those traveling in a private capacity and without a travel certificate were not accommodated; nor could an official extend his privilege to family members or in-laws, except in the case of an official returning home with his family due to illness.

An official traveling by horse was allowed to bring with him only his personal baggage, plus an additional cargo allowance of ten catties (6 kg). Every five catties beyond the limit merited ten strokes of the light bamboo, to a maximum of sixty. (For couriers on horseback, for whom the temptation to use their duties for private gain must have been great, the penalties were doubled.) Officials going by boat or cart were permitted to carry up to thirty catties (18 kg) beyond their personal effects, though any weight beyond the limit was penalized at twice the horse-travel rate. If the official were transporting these goods on behalf of someone else, that person was liable for the same punishment, as was the courier official who turned a blind eye to the extra cargo.

Despite the facilities and staff the state made available to its officials, travel was often a slow and trying experience. Consider, for example, the travel obligations of provincial education intendants. This post was created in 1436 to provide greater surveillance over the system of Confucian schools. To carry out his responsibilities, the education intendant was expected to travel to every county within his jurisdiction at least once a year to inspect the school there. It appears that the intendants met this schedule faithfully only in the first years the post existed. During the mid-Ming they tended to forego travel and scrutinize the educational system by staying in the provincial capital and reading students' compositions forwarded to them. The statecraft scholar, Ch'iu Chün (1420–95), noted in the 1480s that the distances involved discouraged many intendants from making their annual tours, and that some counties might be visited no oftener than once a decade.¹⁵ Keeping to a schedule that required the Hu-kuang education intendant, for example, to travel to the pro-

¹⁴ *TML*, 17, pp. 8b–10a, 16b. When the courier was moving goods or convicts rather than documents, the maximum penalty for delay was lessened to fifty strokes.

¹⁵ Tilemann Grimm, "Ming Education Intendants," in *Chinese government in Ming times: seven studies*, ed. Charles Hucker (New York, 1969), p. 141.

vince's fifteen prefectures, two departments, seventeen subprefectures, and 108 counties¹⁶ every year would have been not only tiring, but physically impossible. The preference to stay in the provincial capital and avoid the travails of the road, rather than indicating the laziness of those appointed to education intendancies, signals that official travel in the Ming was still an onerous duty.

The main barrier to maintaining or expanding the courier service, echoed in the complaint of the compiler of the Ch'iung-chou gazetteer about stations disappearing, but service levy remaining, was its reliance on corvée laborers, far greater in numbers than the couriers themselves, to service the stations. Faced with a choice of maintaining the system's efficiency or lowering its cost of operation, most prefects pressed to make fiscal ends meet chose the latter course. With the monetarization of the economy and the substitution of cash payments for corvée, the work of servicing the courier system and transporting tax goods shifted from corvée laborers to professional service and transport workers. Taxpayers found that hiring the services of boatmen, stevedores, grooms, warehousemen, and customs handlers worked financially in their favor, as they could devote their labor to more profitable uses and cover the service levy with a portion of their earnings; and local magistrates found hired labor more efficient and easier to manage. Even so, the pressure to divert the funds collected in place of corvée were high: commutation simply substituted the problem of preserving the budget line for the courier service for the problem of corvéeing enough laborers to keep it running.

During the last two decades of the Ming, inadequate funding caused abrupt and serious contractions throughout the system. As many as a third of the courier stations were closed nationwide, starting in 1629, in the hope of saving the central treasury 100,000 taels a year. This cut pushed the courier service beyond its already strained capacity, plunging the Ming administration into a vicious circle, for as government communication become impossibly understaffed, the discharged couriers – like the future rebel leader Li Tzu-ch'eng – preyed on those who traveled the official roads they themselves had once serviced. Many a late-Ming magistrate thus had to rely on local militias to keep control of the roads, thereby fueling the militarization that swept China in the final years of the dynasty.¹⁷

16 These numbers of administrative units in Hu-kuang at the end of the dynasty are given in *MS*, p. 1071; Hu-kuang between 1476 and 1497 had five counties fewer than this.

17 E.g., during a flood in Yang-chou prefecture in the late 1620s, "bandits rose in swarms and the road running [through Hsing-hua county] from Kao-yu subprefecture to Yen-ch'eng county was cut. [Hsing-hua Magistrate] Chao Lung led the local militia and captured thirty-seven including the leader," Ch'eng Meng-hsing, et al., *Yang-chou fu-chih* (1733), 27, p. 47a.

Looking back from the early Ch'ing, Ku Yen-wu saw little to praise in the Ming courier system, especially when placed in invidious comparison with earlier dynasties, particularly the T'ang. Ku targeted the decline of the courier system in order to highlight what he regarded as the Ming's general failure to invest adequately in its communications infrastructure. A comment he made to this effect comes in a passage in which he recalls two descriptions he has read of well-appointed courier stations in the T'ang and laments that, by comparison, the stations built in the Ming were "really no better than holding pens for criminals."¹⁸ In the subsequent entries in his *Jih chih lu*, he goes on to deplore the failure of the Ming to keep up roads, plant roadside shade trees, build bridges, and maintain ferries. According to Ku, by starving local officials of the tax proceeds necessary for maintaining these essential facilities, the Ming was digging its own grave. However reasonable this post-Ming critique may be, the Ming fiscal system was structured on the decentralist expectation that the resources for running courier stations were to be locally levied. As long as they were, and the local magistrate exerted himself in the tasks that the courier service devolved upon him, the service could and did operate at a moderately satisfactory level.

The postal service

The contraction of the courier service through the Ming dynasty was made possible in part by the presence of another communications service, the network of post houses. The Yüan dynasty instituted "express post houses" (*chi-ti-p'u*) to expedite urgent communications, and the Ming continued to use them to handle the transmission of urgent official correspondence.¹⁹

Unlike the thinly stretched net of the courier service, which operated only on main routes and did not have a station in every county, the postal service carried the burden of daily communication between counties. Every county had a general post house (*tsung-p'u*) in the county seat. Along the main roads leading into the county, standard post houses (*p'u*) were set up roughly every 10 *li* (6 km), though limits to resources might mean that they were spaced at distances twice or three times that. A small county with a weak transportation system might have as few as three post houses, a large county as many as two dozen. At the upper extreme, Tz'u-li county in Hu-kuang had no less than forty-one post houses distributed along the three roads running

¹⁸ Ku Yen-wu, *Jih-chih-lu-chi-shih*, 12, p. 18b; the text following this remark is translated in part in Yang Lien-sheng, "Ming local administration," p. 20.

¹⁹ See Peter Olbricht, *Das Postwesen in China unter der Mongolenherrschaft im 13 und 14 Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1954).

out of the county, in addition to the general post house in the county seat.²⁰ The number of post houses increased modestly through the middle decades of the dynasty, particularly in peripheral areas, perhaps to adjust for the gradual contraction of the courier service.

As with the courier service, soldiers handled the documents, and corvée labor maintained and supplied the houses. The head of a post house was a junior officer bearing the title of postmaster (*p'u-ssu*). The postmaster was charged with receiving state documents when they reached his post house, verifying their number and destination, and sending them on without delay on to the next post house. Over every ten postmasters was a mail inspector (*yu-chang*), and over all the post houses and staff within a county was a county postal inspector (*p'u-chang*), who was required to inspect every post house once a month to make sure that each was adequately provisioned and equipped and in good repair. Most post houses had four soldiers (*p'u-ping*) from households hereditarily assigned to this service. Post soldiers were on permanent duty and had to be available to move documents at any time of day or night. Damaging, losing, intercepting, or reading documents, or letting the leather pouches in which they were sealed come to harm were punishable offenses; the severity of the punishment was increased in the case of documents dealing with military affairs. Post soldiers were to handle only government documents, and any official who attempted to requisition their services to move private belongings or even state goods was subject to a beating and a fine of sixty copper cash per man per day – which the *Ming code*, by using the term “labor wage” (*ku-kung*), implies was a reasonable portage rate.²¹

The express postal service was designed to move documents in relay from house to house at a rate of 300 *li* (170 km) per twenty-four-hour period. Because post soldiers were required to cover shorter distances than couriers, the scale of penalties they faced for missing deadlines was more severe. A delay of three-quarters of an hour carried a penalty of twenty strokes of the light bamboo, with a stroke added for every subsequent three-quarters of an hour missed to a maximum of fifty strokes.²² The penalties imply that a post soldier could be assigned a dispatch duty lasting up to twenty-four hours. Contrary to scholarly belief that the postal service fell into disuse in the late Ming, most local magistrates were careful to maintain the system through to the end of the dynasty, for without it they lost their lines of communication with the complicated world beyond the county's borders.

²⁰ Ch'en Kuang-ch'ien, *Tz'u-li hsien-chib* (1574), 10, p. 8a.

²¹ *TML*, 17, pp. 12–22, 8a. ²² *TML*, 17, p. 12a.

Transport offices

The early Ming state discovered that the burden of moving state-requisitioned goods was far more than the courier service could handle, and additionally required a measure of coordination at the regional (prefectural) level. In order to facilitate transportation, particularly of grain, but also of the large masses of men corvée to build canals, city walls, and palaces, the Hung-wu reign, in 1376, instituted what were called transport offices (*ti-yün-so*). These were set up usually at a rate of one per prefecture, though in places where transport burdens were high, a second office could be established.

Transport offices were usually situated in prefectural capitals. Where the city was not conveniently located in relation to the main river route through the prefecture, the transport office was situated on the river as close as possible to the capital. As with the courier and postal services, the state transport offices were operated by soldiers assigned permanently to transport duty.²³

Once the great work of dynastic reconstruction was finished, some transport offices that had been active in transmitting goods to the capital lost their reason to exist; they tended to serve thereafter as adjuncts of the courier service. The Shun-t'ien Transport Office in Peking, for example, was largely reduced to providing conveyances and mounts for officials leaving the capital. Some were shut down later in the dynasty. In the case of Hai-nan Island, when the four courier stations were closed down as a cost-saving measure in 1568, the island's only transport office was closed as well.

The grain tribute system

The great state transportation service of the Ming dynasty was the grain tribute (*ts'ao-yün*) system, by which soldiers shipped grain submitted from six southern provinces to the capital and the northern border.²⁴ During the Hung-wu era, when the capital was in Nanking, the principal task of the tribute grain transport was to move foodgrains to the army units stationed in Liao-tung in the northeast. This it did by shipping the grain in sea-going junks up along the Shantung coast and across the Gulf of Po-hai. The volume of husked rice these boats had to carry was considerable: between 500,000 and 600,000 piculs (roughly 50,000–60,000 metric tons). For the year 1380, the volume shipped rose to 700,000 piculs.

23 In border regions under direct military control, like northwestern Shensi, where the maintenance of the transport system demanded a higher level of security, transport officers held the rank of platoon commander (*tsung-ch'i*); Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, p. 161.

24 The tribute system is extensively examined in Hoshi Ayao, *Mindai sōus no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1963), partially translated by Mark Elvin as *The Ming tribute grain system* (Ann Arbor, 1969).

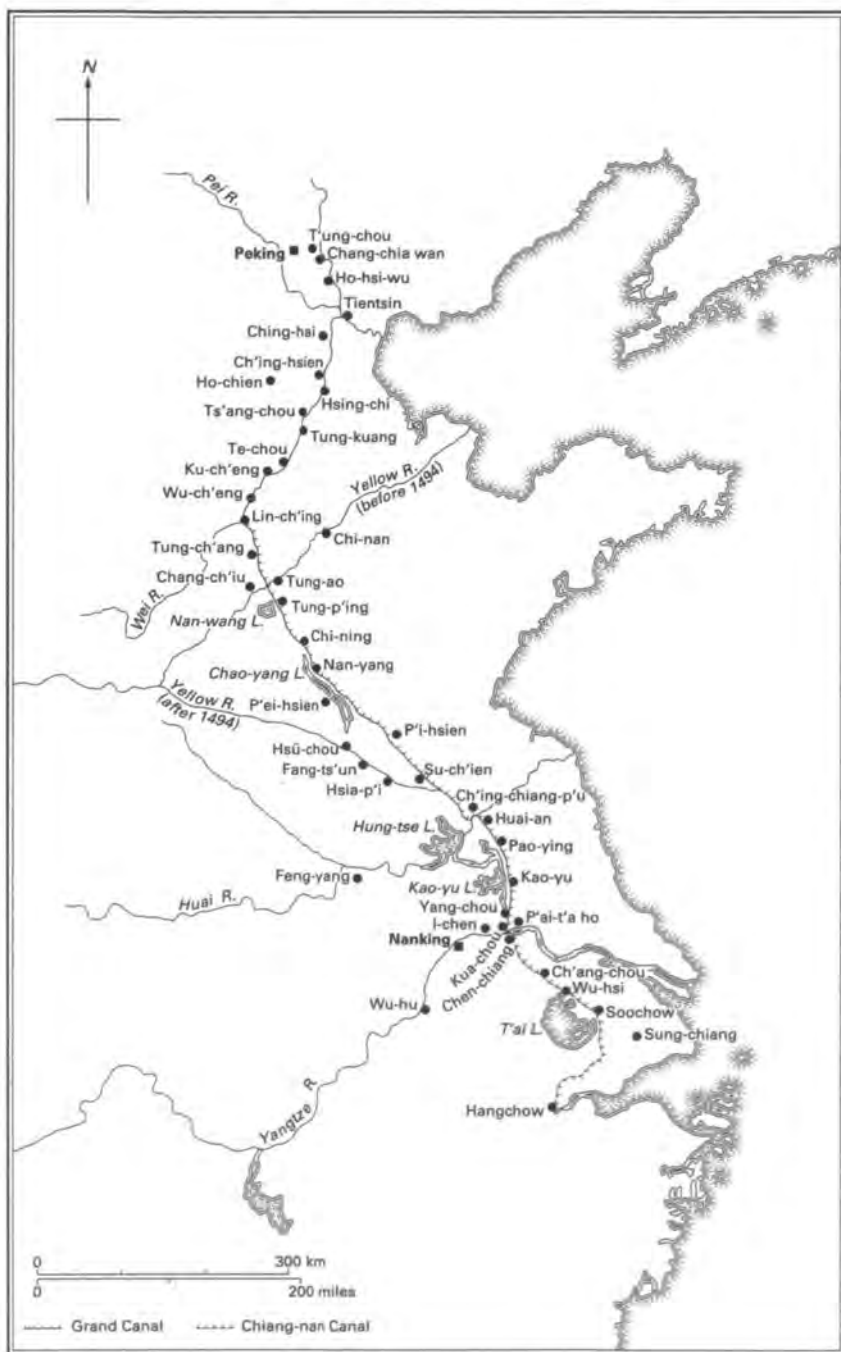
The Yung-lo emperor's decision to relocate the capital to Peking required that this amount be doubled, since the region did not produce grains in sufficient quantity to support a national capital. The volume of grain shipped north continued to increase until 1472, when it was fixed at about four million piculs annually, equivalent to one-seventh of the land tax revenue for the entire country.²⁵ The need to increase substantially the transport of grain northward early in the fifteenth century, coupled with a concern that the maritime route faced both navigational and pirate difficulties, led the newly enthroned Yung-lo emperor in 1403 to order that an inland route be devised. Grain was to be carried in large river barges (having capacities of 300+ piculs of grain) up past the Huai River, then transferred to shallow draft barges (with capacities of 200 piculs and over) for transport through southwestern Shantung, then transferred back to large barges and taken to the Yellow River. There it was to be offloaded and transported overland by corvéed Honanese carters to the Wei River, there to be reloaded onto barges and taken up to Peking. The frequent transfers caused such a strain on manpower that the magistrate of Chi-ning, Shantung, memorialized that the old Grand Canal, which had been allowed to fall into disuse in the Yüan dynasty, be resurrected so as to eliminate the overland bottleneck.²⁶ Once approved, the suggestion committed the Ming to restoring the canal, the major transportation artery connecting north and south.

The Grand Canal

The Grand Canal was not one long canal. It consisted of short stretches of canals that "linked together" (*hui-t'ung*) existing waterways, notably the Pai, Yellow, Huai, Yangtze, and Ch'ien-t'ang rivers – hence the Chinese term for the northern section of the Grand Canal, the Hui-t'ung Canal. It was designed so as to rely wherever possible on the natural flow of the rivers it linked. As most of the course of the Grand Canal traversed flat ground, canal-building was kept to a minimum. Still, some construction and much maintenance was essential to ensure that the minimum depth of three *ch'ih* (0.93 m) needed for the shallow-draft canal barges to clear the bottom was maintained. At low points, the canal had to be dredged to deal with the natural

25 Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, p. 50, referring to transport officers in Ch'ing-yang prefecture, Shensi.

26 Hsieh Pin, *Nanching hu-pu chih*, 10, pp. 1a–1b.



Map 10.4 The Grand Canal

effect of silting. At high points, the challenge was to prevent water from flowing out of channels at too great a rate to maintain adequate depth.

The highest elevation on the canal, and the place where managing water supply was most difficult, was at Nan-wang, Wen-shang county, in southwestern Shantung. The great contribution of the Ming to the centuries-old Grand Canal, and the key project that enabled it to be reopened, was the redesigning of this section. Under the careful supervision of Minister of Works, Sung Li (d. 1422), a large dam was built in 1411 to divert the Wen River southwest in order to feed its water into the Grand Canal at Nan-wang. Sixty percent of the water was diverted north, forty percent south, sufficient to keep water levels in this section of the canal above the necessary minimum. The second element of his project was constructing four large reservoirs at the higher elevation points in Shantung to regulate water levels without having to pump water out of the local water table. Over the next four years, Ch'en Hsüan (1365–1433), field commander-in-chief of the tribute grain transport, supervised the massive project of constructing new channels, embankments, and locks along the lower section of the Grand Canal to bring the waterway into full operation. This project eliminated the portages that had made inland water traffic north of Yangchow slow and cumbersome. Once this work was completed in 1415, the maritime transport route was closed down. Courier stations were spaced every 35–45 kilometers along the route, allowing the Grand Canal to serve as a courier as well as a transport corridor.

When completed, one could travel from Peking to the country's economic core in Chiang-nan along a continuous waterway, barring two sets of rapids at the north end of Nan Chihli. Boatmen passing the Hsü-chou Rapids, a kilometer southeast of Hsü-chou, and the Lü-liang Rapids, another 24 kilometers further south, had to maneuver past grotesque rocks that jutted through the spray and could jam or smash boats that strayed from a precise course. Drinking Ox Rock, which rose out of the foam at the head of the Lü-liang Rapids, was the tallest obstacle in the canal, standing over eleven meters out of the water. Though barely two meters wide, it shattered many a boat negotiating its entry into the rapids. The longest rock in the Lü-liang Rapids stretched 24 meters down the middle of the canal and could be deadly for downriver boats when the wind suddenly came up. Further down Lü-liang lay Redstone Rock. Though only a meter wide and two meters long, not a day would go by in high-water season without at least one boat being gutted on it. The Hsü-chou Rapids were cleared first, in 1464, on the initiative of the bureau secretary in charge of the rapids (*kuan-hung chu-shih*). Eight decades later, the bureau

secretary at the more difficult Lü-liang Rapids carried out the same task there.²⁷

The tribute grain that the Grand Canal was revived to transport was assessed on six southern provinces. At the start of the dynasty, households in those provinces assessed for tribute grain were responsible for transporting the grain themselves (or paying for the transport costs) to regional depots, from whence it was transported to Nanking by the army. The grain generated by the regular land tax was handled in the same way: Tax captains (*liang-chang*), adjuncts of the *li-chia* system, were charged with seeing that the tax grain collected within their jurisdictions was transported to designated collection points, a service they rendered without remuneration. With the reopening of the Grand Canal, the grain had to be taken as far as the state granaries in Huai-an in the northern part of Nan Chihli, or to Chi-ning in Shantung, depending on the province from which the grain was coming. Three thousand shallow-draft barges transferred the grain collected at the Huai-an granary up to Chi-ning, and another two thousand moved the grain from Chi-ning to T'ung-chou, the major supply depot just east of Peking, where it was stored. Tribute grain was shipped four times a year. In 1432, this arrangement was replaced by the "transmittance method" (*tui-fa*), by which army transporters took over the work of moving the grain in some areas. They were paid out of surcharges levied on the taxpayers assessed for tribute grain. This shift from corvée transport to paid transport was extended in 1481 with what was called "converted transmittance transport" (*kai-tui-yün*), by which transport to auxiliary granaries along the Grand Canal, which had remained the responsibility of tribute-payers, was also turned over to soldiers.

For a tax system that operated in kind, the burden of transport required much handling, thereby adding significantly to the administrative costs that a taxpayer had to meet. This was particularly so for Ming China, which not only ruled over a vast territory by pre-Yüan standards, but which, after 1403, directed a major portion of its revenues to a capital far removed from the country's main sources of grain supply. While subordination within a spatially large state may have conferred some advantage for ordinary cultivators in terms of security and low defense costs, it certainly imposed transportation burdens that translated into higher taxes for cultivators. Initially, the main surcharge added to the tribute grain (as well as to other tax items), known as *hao* or wastage, was imposed to cover the costs due to spills, spoilage, and

27 These excavations are thoroughly studied in Ts'ai T'ai-pin, *Ming-tai ts'ao-bo chih cheng-chih yü kuan-li* (Taipei, 1992), ch. 3; see pp. 54–56 for Bureau Secretary Ch'en Mu-chien's detailed account of the Lü-liang rocks.

loss. For tribute grain that had to be shipped to Peking from as far away as Hu-kuang, the surcharges could rise to as high as 80 percent of the cost of the grain. Fiscal historian, Ray Huang, has noted that this scale of surcharge was not unreasonable, for "long-distance delivery of grain involved many transfers before the destination was reached. Porter and wagon services were required to clear the canal sluices; lighters were called for when canals and rivers became too shallow. These transfers resulted in losses. Husked rice, when dampened, ferments easily. Quite frequently after each transfer the grain had to be sun-dried, during which process its volume shrank drastically, by as much as 8.5 percent in five hours (as established by an official experiment)."²⁸ The Ming government chose not to absorb these losses into the operating costs of the fiscal system: the amount of tax grain a taxpayer was assessed was not the amount he furnished, but the amount received at the final point of destination.

In addition to relying on taxpayers to cover the transport costs, the grain tribute system distributed its infrastructural costs, most particularly the maintenance of the Grand Canal and the construction of boats, among the local civil administrations and military units through which the canal ran. Ray Huang has criticized this aspect of Ming taxation: "The entire tribute grain system and the canal administration received no central financing. The waterway was maintained by local *corvée* labor without any subsidies from the central government. The transportation corps by the mid-fifteenth century had 121,500 officers and men operating 11,775 grain boats. The personnel drew their pay and rations from the 124 guards and independent battalions from which they were detached. Even the construction of service craft, carried out every ten years, was financed partially by deductions from the payroll of the soldiers operating them, and partly by remittances from those counties which furnished the tribute grain."²⁹

Thirty-four of these guards (*wei*) were stationed in the Nanking region. Their contributions accounting for 20,608 transport soldiers and 1,895 shallow-draft barges. To keep their barge fleets at adequate strength, these guards had a standing annual order for seventy-four new barges from the Ch'ing-chiang Boatworks in Huai-an.³⁰ This was only a portion of the demand for boats from Ch'ing-chiang, which was responsible for building altogether about half the boats that worked the Grand Canal. Organized into eighty-two small shipyards along one stretch of the Huai River, the soldier-boat-

²⁸ Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 51.

²⁹ Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, pp. 53–55.

³⁰ Hsieh Pin, *Nanching hu-pu chih* (1550), 10, p. 182a.

builders of Ch'ing-chiang in the early Ming reached an annual capacity of 746 vessels and were producing 550 barges a year in the 1460s.³¹

The military thus provided the labor and materials for building and operating the boats on the Grand Canal at no direct cost to the state. Instead, the cost was borne largely by the soldier-boatmen themselves, who were compensated by being permitted to carry a limited volume of goods beyond personal effects on the government boats. By trading in these goods, or carrying them on consignment for merchants, the boatmen could make up for the expenses of the journey. The soldiers carried far more than the amount they were legally entitled to carry, an open secret that only a tactlessly scrupulous official would seek to disclose. It was understood that private carriage is what paid for the canal. By organizing the financing of its shipping costs in this way, the Ming state was relying directly on the profitability of private commerce to pay for its costs, though without expressly acknowledging that this is what it was doing. The labor of moving the barges was only part of the costs of running the Grand Canal. Other labor tasks, such as maintaining the waterway and docking facilities, was *corvée* without compensation from residents of the counties unfortunate enough to find themselves lying along the course of the canal. According to later figures provided by Ku Yen-wu, 47,004 full-time *corvée* laborers, 30 percent of them from Shan-tung province alone, were required to keep the Grand Canal functioning.³² The government thus relied on both the ancient agrarian principle of *corvée* levying and the commercial principle of commodity trading to underwrite the operating costs of the system.

As this arrangement indicates, the Grand Canal was as much an artery for private commercial transport as it was a conduit for the transmittance of state tribute. It was not the state's particular intention to invest in this piece of the country's transportation infrastructure for the purpose of making private trade between north and central China feasible, nor of facilitating the spread of commercial networks into northern Nan Chihli, Honan, and Shan-tung provinces, though the investment had both results. The simple fact that the canal was not restricted to state barges but allowed private traffic does suggest that the commercial use of the infrastructure was at least expected, if it was not actually intended. The opportunity that the reopening of the Grand Canal created quickly established commercial demand for shipping private goods along its waterways.³³

31 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 56.

32 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 336, n.48.

33 For Sui, T'ang, and Sung precedents for the construction and employment of the principal north-south canals, see Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 84-93.

The state soon became aware of this commercial traffic and, fourteen years after the canal was put back into operation, imposed transit duties on private goods. A chain of seven customs barriers between Peking and Nanking, six of which were on the Grand Canal, was established in 1429. It monitored the movement of official grain and taxed private goods.³⁴ A captain who ran his boat past a barrier or refused to pay duty on its cargo faced confiscation of both. This collection was a simple matter of garnering revenue and was not tied to the investment that yielded it. The proceeds went into the imperial coffers, not the accounts of the Grain Transport Commission.

TRANSPORT

Transport in Ming China, like courier communications, went either by land or water. Land transport involved horses (which were expensive and used mostly by couriers, officials, and military officers), portable sedan-chairs, ox- or donkey-carts, and wheelbarrows. Water transport was by boats, which could be sailed, rowed, poled, or towed depending on their type. Which mode of transport was used depended on who or what was being transported, where it was going, and whether time was more important than cost. The fastest form of transportation was by horse, but that was suitable only for individual travel or for dispatching documents, and depended on the condition of roads and river crossings. Water was the most economical way to transport both people and goods in bulk.

Data on traditional modes of transport collected and published in Shanghai in 1937 show that a river boat could move ten metric tons of goods at a rate of 75 kilometers a day. By comparison, an animal-drawn cart could move three-quarters of a ton at a rate of 50 kilometers a day; a wheelbarrow a tenth of a ton 40 kilometers; and a coolie a twenty-fifth of a ton at the same rate. A sedan-chair, requiring two bearers, had the same capacity as two wheelbarrowers: able to move a fifth of a ton 40 kilometers a day.³⁵ Transporting goods by land was thus vastly more expensive than by water, less a matter of speed than of capacity. The cost of cart transport in the Ming is reflected in an official report from the 1460s: it cost five taels of silver to cart a ton of charcoal by road to Peking from the charcoal factory in I-chou, 230 kilometers west of the capital.³⁶ Such costs made the overland shipment of large quantities unthinkable except when waterways were unavailable.

34 The seven customs barriers were located in Kuo county (outside T'ung-chou, the tribute grain depot east of Peking), Lin-ch'ing, Chi-ning, Hsü-chou, Huai-an, Yang-chou, and Shang-hsin-ho (outside Nanking); see *Nan-ching hu-pu chih* (1550), 12, p. 152.

35 Yuan-li Wu, *The spatial economy of communist China* (New York, 1967), p. 126.

36 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 57.

Water transport

Boats in the Ming came in many shapes and sizes, varying their arrangements of sails, oars, rudders, and drafts to every possible situation. Cheng Jo-tseng (fl. 1505–80), whose work on mapping the Chekiang seaboard in the 1560s will be mentioned later, outlines the sorts of boats one would find plying the rivers of Chiang-nan in a short text he appended to a map of Lake T'ai.³⁷ Not content simply to list them, Cheng created classifications for them. This he does in the first instance by distinguishing types of boats according to the size of the bodies of water they were intended to traverse, since that determined the kinds of winds they were designed to handle or withstand. He identifies four main types: boats designed to sail the Yangtze River, boats on the inland waterways, lake boats, and sea-going junks. Yangtze boats were of two types, large and small, the large being those that sailed upriver to Hu-kuang and Szechwan, the small being those that ran the gorges and ferried people across the river. Inland waterway boats were also of two types, official barges and private lighters.

It was the boats out on Lake T'ai that showed the greatest variety, and seemed most to capture Cheng's interest. He begins with specialized lake boats: "Those used to move stone are called mountain boats (*shan-ch'uan*), those used to move merchandise are called transshipment boats (*po-ch'uan*), those that private individuals come and go in are called embankment boats (*i'ang-ch'uan*), those used by garrisons and police stations are called patrol boats (*hsiin-ch'uan*), those sailed by militiamen and water guards are called scout boats (*shao-ch'uan*), and those that cross back and forth at fords are called ferry boats (*tu-ch'uan*)." According to Cheng, none of these six types of lake boat handled in a storm as well as the fishing boats that plied the lakes of Chiang-nan day and night in all seasons of the year. These fishing boats he graded according to number of masts, from two (with a capacity of less than 100 piculs) to six (able to carry 2,000 piculs). Four-masters were the most versatile: large enough to carry 1,000 piculs, yet small enough to enter most harbors, and easily lashed two together at night to make a sort of small floating fortress that pirates preferred not to attack. Three- and two-masters were more common, however. Besides these standard fishing boats, Cheng notes several other types: riversiders (*chiang-pien ch'uan*), which had from two to five masts and, like the regular fishing boats, capacities of up to 2,000 piculs; boatyard rudder-boats (*ch'ang shao-ch'uan*), which could carry up to 700 piculs; miniatures (*hsiao-hsien ch'uan*), with a capacity of less than 100; cut-net boats

37 Cheng Jo-tseng, "T'ai-hu t'u," quoted in Ku Yen-wu, *T'ien-hsia chün-kuo li-ping shu* (1662, rpt. Kyoto, 1975), 4, pp. 32–42.

(*chien-wang ch'uan*), narrow but very fast; thread-net boats (*ssu-wang ch'uan*), which could hold only three people but made good speed in a wind; and dingheys (*hua-ch'uan*) that three or four men could row faster than cut-net boats and maneuver into places other boats could not go. To this list, Cheng adds several other types unique to Wu-chiang and Ch'ang-chou counties in Soochow. The mere variety attests to the sophistication of boat design in the Ming.

The Grand Canal was the critical artery linking north China to the extensive network of inland water routes throughout the Yangtze River valley from Kiangnan to Szechwan. As such, it was singly the most important contribution that the Ming state made to China's transportation infrastructure, both for moving state goods and for shipping private merchandise. Yet, the Ming state sponsored other lesser projects that contributed to marked improvement in regional transportation systems. One of the most significant in the early Ming was the construction of the East Dams at the south end of Nanking's Ying-t'ien prefecture in the first years of the dynasty. The principal concern motivating this project was the problem of flooding on Lake T'ai, since a rise in the lake level resulted in Soochow, some 350 kilometers by water east of the dams, being inundated. As it happened, Soochow also lacked inland water routes integrating it adequately with the larger Lower Yangtze region. The dams improved inland waterways in such a way as to create a westward route linking Soochow to the Yangtze River port of Wu-hu. Boats traveling this route had to be dragged over the lower dam and cargo had to be transhipped 6 kilometers further west at the upper dam;³⁸ but despite these bottlenecks, the route significantly improved Soochow's water access to markets throughout Chiang-nan, thereby ensuring its position as the central place in the regional economy.³⁹ Further state-directed construction on the canal system east of Soochow starting in 1403 would complete the task of reworking Chiang-nan's rivers into an efficient transportation network.⁴⁰ In both cases, the work was carried out at the request of the Ministry of Revenue, not the Ministry of War. The government's principal concern was to control the flooding of fields so as to improve tax yields, not to open transportation routes. But the effect of water control was to improve transportation that benefited commerce more than the state.

38 Tan-i-tzu, *T'ien-hsia lu-ch'eng t'u-yin*, p. 385.

39 The importance of Wu-hu as a transportation nexus is highlighted in the route book *Shih-shang yao-lan*, which originates five of its fifty south-China routes in Wu-hu, a number exceeded only by the routes out of Hui-chow, Soochow, and Hangchow; see Tan-i-tzu, *T'ien-hsia lu-ch'eng t'u-yin*, pp. 407–11.

40 Michael Marmé, "Heaven on earth: The rise of Suzhou, 1127–1550." In *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China*, ed. Linda Cooke Johnson (Albany, 1993), p. 31.

The building of canals in Chiang-nan and elsewhere in the Ming was often done to address the need to moderate the natural fluctuations in water supply, whether it was flooding that overran the banks, or drought that lowered the water in channels to keel-scraping levels. This fluctuation was usually seasonal, and continued to affect the greater part of China's transportation network that was beyond the control of dams and locks, or beyond the government's willingness to invest in them. Aside from the Grand Canal, the Ming state undertook large watercourse projects only when it was tackling larger water-supply problems. The physical maintenance of waterways and roads within the capital regions was one of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Works,⁴¹ but their improvement was not. Much the same orientation characterized regional and local administrations as well. River routes that rapids made dangerous or portages made cumbersome to use were left unimproved unless, as noted, their improvement was part of some irrigation or flood-prevention project. Even on the Grand Canal it took half a century of sinkings along the Hsü-chou Rapids before the state was moved to make the necessary investment there and another eight decades before the Lü-liang Rapids were cleared and the route they bottlenecked made more efficient. But this sort of improvement, however much it was needed elsewhere on China's inland waterways, was not forthcoming. It lay outside the state's vision of its responsibilities. Where a small project like cutting a short canal past a difficult point in a river was undertaken, as often as not it was carried out by a private individual, undertaken for philanthropic or commercial reasons, not on the initiative of the local magistrate.⁴²

The Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci discovered how perilous waterways could be when he and a young Chinese convert, who had taken the Portuguese name of João Barradas, were heading north with an official through Kiangsi province in 1595 on the shallow-draft boats that plied China's inland waterways. The Kan River, as it descended the 115 kilometers from the prefectural seat of Kan-chou to the county of Wan-an, passed through a series of eighteen rapids that, says the popular 1570 route book compiled by Hui-chou merchant, Huang Pien, "pose no danger going up but are difficult going down."⁴³ At the third of these rapids, the warning proved to be an understatement, as Ricci later recounted: "We reached the place called Tien Chutan [T'ien-kua T'an], where the current runs swiftly and the water is very deep, at the foot of a tall mountain, and the thundering of the water was so great that when I saw it I began to pray fervently that it subside. For the ships in

41 *TMHT*, cb. 208.

42 See, for example, Lin Yu-nien, ed., *An-ch'i hsien-chih* (1552), 1, p. 11a, referring to the canal past Yüan-k'ou Ferry dug by Li Sen; An-ch'i county is in Ch'üan-chou prefecture, Fukien.

43 Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, p. 216.

[Kiangsi] rivers have high masts and no keels, and I realized how easily they might turn over in the thundering water, but no matter how much I beseeched them, the pilot and the sailors were so careless that they took the ship into the rapids under full sail, and in a moment our ship was turned over and spun around, along with two others in which were the mandarin's possessions. Thus did I and João Barradas, as we were traveling together, get sent to the bottom. But God aided me because in turning I caught hold of some ropes dangling from our ship, and was able to pull myself up onto a support of the same ship. And seeing my writing case and bed floating there on top of the water, I was able to stretch out my hand and pull them to where I was, after which some sailors swimming back to the boat and climbing aboard, helped me to clamber back up. But João Barradas went to the bottom in such a way that the current carried him away and he never appeared again."⁴⁴

Why Ricci's sailors appeared indifferent to the danger at the T'ien-kua Rapids is unclear: if it is not simply Ricci's characteristic annoyance showing itself here, or the sailors' incompetence, it may have been that they were under contract to reach a certain destination by a certain date and did not feel that they could afford to take the rapids at a more cautious pace. Most rivers, including the Kan, were not unnavigable, just dangerous, and dangerous by season. When in flood, they flowed at a pace that made the control of boats difficult; in dry seasons, submerged rocks rose to the surface.

The seasonal character of river transport can be seen on the route into Szechwan along Yangtze River. East of the great food catchment area of Tung-t'ing Lake in Hu-kuang, the Yangtze was a reasonably stable river and did not vary with the seasons, but further west into Szechwan the spring floods made upriver passage difficult. Merchants knew that the best time to ship goods up by river to Szechwan was the fall and winter, when water levels were low, and that it was better to bring goods down from Szechwan in spring and summer, when the water was higher and faster moving. Merchants trading into Yunnan were not completely hampered by the seasonal character of river transport through Szechwan. When the flooding Yangtze made the upriver trip too difficult, they took an alternate water and land route known as the east route down through Hu-kuang and Kweichow, slower but more navigable.⁴⁵ The search for such alternate routes that could link places at all times of the year, and so free transportation from its seasonal character, was

44 Quoted in Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York, 1985), pp. 91–92. The rapid was T'ien-kua T'an, thirty kilometers north of Kan-chou; Ricci miscounted (or mistranscribed) the four horizontal lines of the left-hand radical in *kua* (hang) as three, causing him to misread it as *chu* (prop), a common error.

45 Tan-i-tzu, *T'ien-bsia lu-ch'eng t'u-yin*, p. 494; Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, p. 55.

part of the process encouraging the expansion of China's internal transportation network during the Ming. Even so, the tendency of China's rivers to flow parallel to each other in an eastward direction, rather than to intersect, means that alternative routes were impossible to establish in many parts of the country.

The lay of China's land lent the connections across watersheds great importance. Crossing rough or high terrain, they were difficult and therefore essential for interregional integration. The Kan river, for instance, was on the key crossing between Kiangsi and Kwangtung. Those crossing from Hu-kuang into Kwangtung faced even greater difficulties. To reach Kwangtung from the middle Yangtze region, one had to boat down the Hsiang River to Heng-chou, then follow a tributary up to Ch'en-chou. There, one had to go overland for 50 kilometers; if one were a merchant shipping goods, this overland stretch was slow and expensive. At the town of I-chang, where a small river flows south into Kwangtung, one could take to water again, though only small boats with a capacity of ten piculs could navigate the river. These boats ferried cargo as far as the northwestern Kwangtung commercial center at Kuan-p'u, where it was reloaded onto "mulberry boats" – which were only slightly larger, with a capacity of twenty piculs – and shipped down into the provincial core.⁴⁶

There was one further restriction on the free movement of goods and people by water, and that was winter. Hui-chou merchant Huang Pien, in his route book of 1570, advised merchants going up to Peking in the winter to return south as quickly as possible to avoid the ice. The problem was usually not that the canal froze solid, but that it did not. The ice that formed was not durable enough to hold carts and started melting whenever the sun came out.⁴⁷ During exceptionally cold winters, however, the canal in Shantung could freeze solid, as it did in the winter of 1567–68, for which it is recorded that temperatures in Shantung fell so far that animals froze to death.⁴⁸

Land transport

The Ming state did not undertake road projects of the scale of the Grand Canal, or even of the East Dams. The work of building and repairing roads and bridges fell to local initiative, frequently of the local magistrate, whose duties included maintaining overland transportation routes. Mundane invest-

46 Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, p. 237.

47 Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, p. 147.

48 Timothy Brook, *Geographical sources of Ming-Qing history* (Ann Arbor, 1988), pp. 15–16.

ments at the local level in the form of roads and bridges on courier and postal routes were nonetheless essential for supporting overland transportation in the Ming, and they were forthcoming under magistrates in the early days of the dynasty carrying out the Hung-wu reconstruction of local society after the inter-dynastic war.

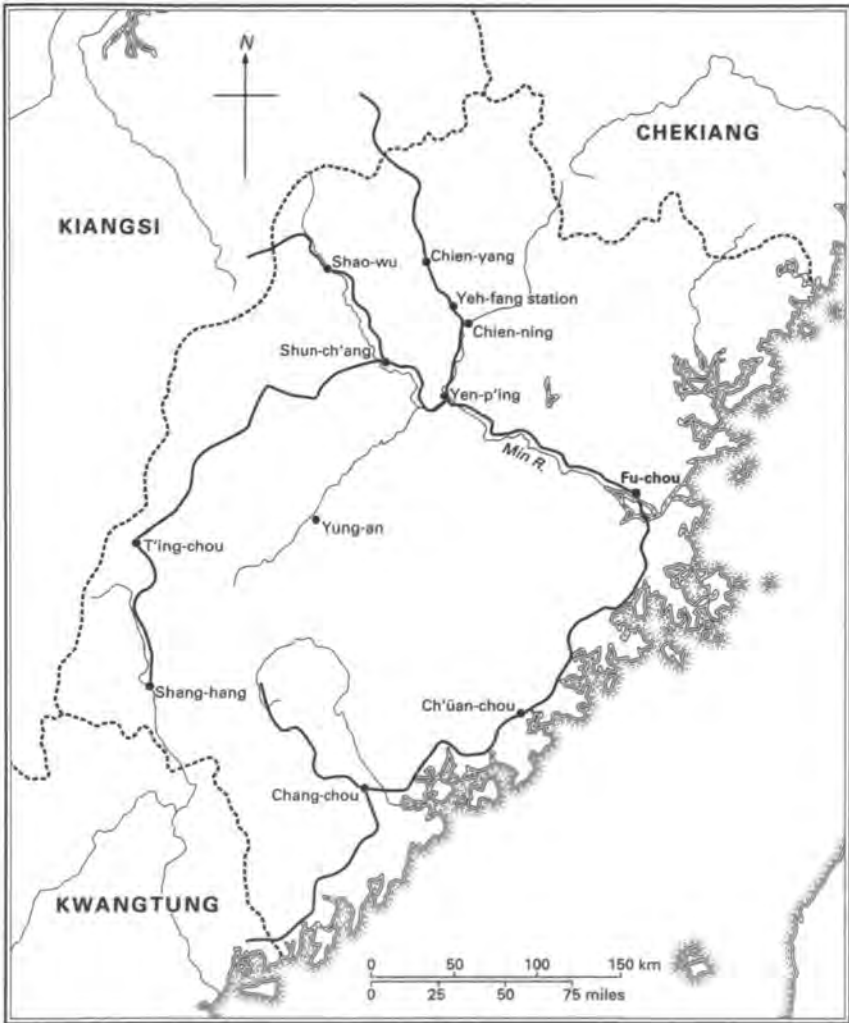
The best roads consisted of stones laid down in the middle and the earth compacted as shoulders on each side. The road that ran through the center of Wen-ch'ang county, Kwangtung, was paved in 1592 with blocks of locally quarried stone 60 centimeters by 30 centimeters and cut to a thickness of 6 centimeters. The road was so well constructed that it survived the great earthquake of 1605, which otherwise managed to destroy every structure in town except for the Temple to Confucius, and it is still in use today.⁴⁹ Since stone-laying was expensive, such construction was used only for official roads, and usually only for those sections that passed through major cities. Most roads, official and otherwise, were constructed simply of gravel and sand. They were not greatly resistant to wear and weather and required constant attention. Magistrates paid for the work by recruiting labor through corvée and by using a portion of the tax revenue they were permitted to retain to cover administrative expenses.

Roads could sink into some state of disrepair before passage became impossible; not so bridges or fords. If a river could not be crossed, the line of communication was broken. As one magistrate pointed out, "In a county where the streams are numerous and the canals wide, people will be hindered from crossing if the government does not act. For this reason, fords have boats and banks have bridges of stone or wood so that travelers through the realm are happily able to go by road."⁵⁰

The Hung-wu era stands out particularly as a time when bridges were extensively built or restored. To cite Shansi province as one example, the Hung-wu era was by far the most active phase of bridge-building during the first century of Ming rule, according to the information preserved in the provincial gazetteer of 1682. In every case in which the builder of the bridge is recorded, it is the county magistrate. After the Hung-wu era, bridge-building was revived in the 1410s and again in the late 1430s and early 1440s. These were phases of central government activism under the Yung-lo emperor and during the regency of the youthful Cheng-t'ung emperor, when local officials were rewarded for undertaking local initiatives. Bridge-building was revived again in the Hung-chih era, notably in central and south China, and possibly at an unprecedented rate.

49 Chu Yün-ts'ai, *Wen-ch'ang hsien wen-wu chih* (1988), p. 61.

50 Pao Ying, *Ku-shih hsien-chih* (1659), 3, p. 18a.



Map 10.5 Routes within Fukien Province

Some of the bridge-building activity in the Ming involved replacing wooden bridges with more permanent stone structures, although this investment was expensive and usually carried out only under pressing circumstances.⁵¹ Across rivers that had not been bridged, however, a common first step was to build a floating bridge. A good many, it seems, were built in the mid-

⁵¹ E.g., on Hai-nan Island, many wooden bridges were replaced with stone between 1466 and 1470 in the wake of the massive flooding that struck south China in 1465; *Cb'ung-chou fu-chib* (1619), 12, p. 3b.

Ming, perhaps at a time when the increasing commercial use of transportation routes was causing bottlenecks in the early Ming system that had to be resolved in economical ways. For example, the magistrate of Shun-ch'ang county, Fukien, sponsored the building of a thirty-six pontoon floating bridge at West Ford in 1499 for precisely this reason, noting that "those going back and forth at the point where the rivers from Shao-wu and T'ing-chou converge are frustrated getting across." Where floating bridges already existed in the mid-Ming, efforts were made to improve them to accommodate heavier traffic. The thirty-eight pontoon Ming-ts'ui Bridge, downriver from Shun-ch'ang at the Yen-p'ing prefectural capital, had been widened and rebuilt with thicker planks to carry horse traffic two years before the building of the bridge at West Ford.⁵² Previously, horses could not be taken across the bridge, a situation which would have required the unloading and reloading of goods being moved by horseback.

The funds for bridge-building came often not from the county budget, but from the purses of private individuals concerned to improve transportation. West Ford Bridge, for instance, was built with the help of a benefactor identified only as a "charitable commoner" (*i-min*). The replanking of Ming-ts'ui Bridge was carried out under the direction of a "charitable official" (*i-kuan*), a term of respect for a local philanthropist who was not necessarily an official or even a member of the gentry. Other patrons of bridge-building in Yen-p'ing prefecture during the Hung-chih era were referred to as an "official out of office" (*san-kuan*), a "local resident" (*li-jen*), and a "county resident" (*i-jen*).⁵³ Such titles, as well as more general rubrics like "charitable commoner" or "local resident," are how the non-gentry wealthy, frequently merchants, appear in mid-Ming records. Given the particular interest merchants had in seeing transportation networks maintained and improved, it would appear that they were the principal source of funding for the flood of bridge-building at the close of the fifteenth century. This represents a shift from the first century of the Ming. According to the 1526 gazetteer of Yen-p'ing prefecture, to continue the example already used, bridge-builders in the early Ming were equally officials and private individuals, whereas in the mid-Ming, bridges built by private funds outnumbered those built by officials five to one. The construction of local roads similarly depended largely on financing provided by the local elite,

52 Cheng Ch'ing-yün and Hsin Shao-tso, *Yen-p'ing fu-chih* (1526), 3, pp. 16b, 24a.

53 Cheng Ch'ing-yün and Hsin Shao-tso, *Yen-p'ing fu-chih* (1526), 14, pp. 312-342, is unusual among prefectural gazetteers in listing the names of those who had received the titles *i-kuan* and *san-kuan*; the latter, far less common, were rewarded with the seventh rank, although they did not serve in the bureaucracy. See also Chang Shih-yü, *Lung-ch'üan hsien-chih* (1878), 2, pp. 16b-17b.

although the occasional need to expropriate land meant that the magistrate often had to be involved.⁵⁴

At rivers where bridges were not built, travelers and shippers had to make do with ferries. The cost of a ferry involved little more than barriers and moorings at each side of the river, one or two boats, and the labor to operate them. Yet even fords needed regular investment, however limited. A magistrate in south China warned that “the barriers at every state ford must be replaced annually. If this work is delayed, then how will travelers [literally, ‘those seeking the fords’] be able to avoid wasting time? Isn’t repairing them in good time an urgent administrative task?”⁵⁵ Fords on post roads tended to be of this sort; that is, official, and therefore a burden on the magistrate’s budget. The labor to operate them was supplied by boatman households (*ch’uan-hu*), designated to serve in this capacity as their corvée levy. Most state ferries were available for the use of private travelers for a fee, though ferries on important military routes could be restricted to the use of official personnel only. It seems, though, that many if not most fords were privately operated: boatmen plied the river and charged travelers fees for their service.

Commercial transport

The network of roads and inland waterways that state and private transport utilized set the conditions for the commercialization of transportation. In Chiang-nan at the very least, the emergence of regular transportation services for hire was well advanced by the sixteenth century, and probably much earlier. One could “hop a boat” (*t’iao ch’uan*), as the expression went, in Yangchow and get down to the north gate of Kua-chou, on the Yangtze River, for 3 copper cash. One walked through to the south gate to catch another boat that, for 2 cash, would ferry you across the river to the Chen-chiang wharf on the south bank of the Yangtze. From the wharf, one entered the west gate of Chen-chiang, then walked one and a half kilometers down to the south gate to catch a boat heading down the Grand Canal. If one had baggage, a porter could be hired at the wharf for 0.015 tael per load. At the south gate, a relay of six boats could be taken that sailed during the day, reaching as far as Wu-chiang county south of Soochow. From Wu-chiang, either a day or night boat could be taken to Chia-hsing, and from there, a day boat

54 Li Hsi and Ts’ai Fan, eds., *Cb’iung-shanhsien-chib* (1917), 5, p. 51a, regarding gentry financing; 6, p. 11a, regarding the expropriation of land needed to construct a dike needed to widen a road within the prefectural capital in 1447.

55 *Cb’iung-chou-fu-chib* (1619), 4, p. 97a. For an example of a private ford taken over as an official ford, see 4.88b.

up to Sung-chiang, or a day or a night boat down to Hangchow. The route east from Hangchow to Ning-po, traversed in the opposite direction by Ch'oe Pu's party, was well serviced, due to the pilgrimage traffic going out to the Buddhist island of P'u-t'o, and commercial boats plied the route day and night. If the destination was Hui-chou prefecture, home to many of the great merchants of the mid- to late Ming, a night ferry could be taken from Soochow to Hu-chou, then another night ferry from Hu-chou to Ssu-an on the Chekiang border. There, the navigable rivers ran out and one had to switch to land travel; commercial carriers in Ssu-an offered a choice of sedan-chairs, carts, and horses for those going to the prefectural capital.⁵⁶

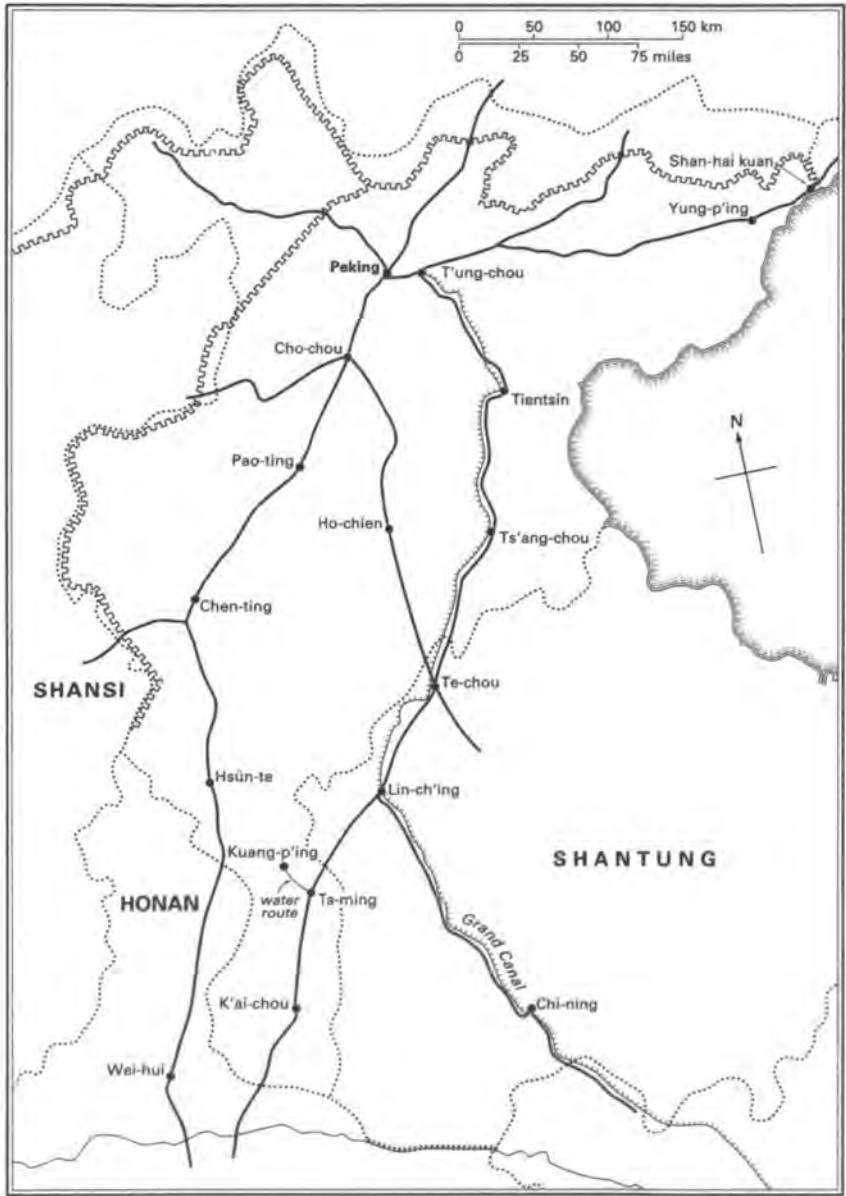
The references to night travel are significant. While many cities in Chiang-nan offered day and night boat links with other commercial centers, others did not, for fear of bandit attack. Even in the Chiang-nan core, the one element that constrained efficient transportation linkage was security. According to Huang Pien's route book of 1570, the area south of Lake T'ai was so secure that most of the boats out of Hu-chou left at night, permitting passengers to get to their destinations without losing a day's worth of business. But no commercial boats went north from Soochow at night, and Sung-chiang at the eastern end of the Chiang-nan core was serviced only by day boats.⁵⁷ By contrast, a later route book of 1626 was less confident of Chiang-nan; and indeed, rural security in Chiang-nan was declining in the closing decades of the dynasty. The compiler noted that the densely settled area close to Hangchow, which lay directly south of Hu-chou, was safe for travel, but it advised that one should not travel at dawn or dusk and warned against going into the area at all in times of dearth. As for the area around Soochow, the text noted that banditry was rife in years of poor harvests and that one could travel in rural Soochow only with an armed guard.⁵⁸

Outside the Chiang-nan core, the problems of security only increased. The Grand Canal south of Yang-chou, where the Grand Canal met the Yangtze River and both salt and cotton merchants congregated, was said to be free of bandits day or night; but salt smuggling in the region north of Yang-chou made night travel there impossible. Huang Pien advised merchants to be cautious when hiring local boatmen, of whose honesty he had a low opinion. After crossing the Yellow River, the problem was not that the men you hired would steal your goods, but that they would sign on for a lump sum fee in order to pay off debts and then disappear halfway to the capital.

⁵⁶ These commercial routes, services, and prices are given in Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, pp. 232–34. Although Huang did not publish his route book until 1570, he was reporting commercial routes established well before that date.

⁵⁷ Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, pp. 233, 235.

⁵⁸ Tan-i-tzu, *T'ien-hsia lu-ch'eng t'u-yin*, p. 373.



Map 10.6. Routes within North Chih-li

In the final stretch between Tientsin and Peking, security again became an issue. One could travel at night along this route, though Huang advised caution. Traveling by the Grand Canal was far safer than taking the overland route, however. For the northern segment of that route, one had to take an armed guard against the mounted bandits that irregularly roamed the North China Plain. Indeed, the stretch from Ying-chou to Ta-ming was so unpredictable that even an armed guard might be insufficient. By contrast, insisted Huang, merchants who went west from the Grand Canal through K'ai-feng to southern Shansi faced no such problems. The area west of the town of Ch'ing-hua, the major transport nexus in northern Honan for Shansi merchants trading southward, was so free of bandits that one could travel at night, even when there was a full moon.⁵⁹ Possibly the volume of commercial traffic through the area, adjacent to the home base of the great Shansi merchant families of the mid- to late Ming, made it more secure than the less traveled overland route on the North China Plain.

Maritime transport

Ming China was reasonably well integrated by its internal transportation and communication networks. So too, though perhaps to a lesser extent, it was tied by numerous maritime links to Japan and Southeast Asia, and at times points even further west. The Ming is generally regarded as a period when China rejected overseas contact and turned its gaze, at best, to the continent and at worst, inwardly to itself. This reputation is based largely on our understanding of Ming diplomacy, which preferred to limit contact with overseas states to the reception of tribute, and of its maritime policies, which severely restricted imports and exports and tended to regard maritime trade as piracy.

The Yung-lo emperor took a different initiative, one that was more in keeping with earlier Mongol patterns of international relations, by dispatching a series of great maritime expeditions to Southeast Asia and into the Indian Ocean under the direction of Grand Eunuch Cheng Ho (1371–1435). The first sailed in 1403–05, the seventh and last in 1431–33 under the Hsüan-te emperor. These expeditions were massive projects, each involving tens of thousands of government soldiers and over a hundred ships (the largest expedition comprised over three hundred ships), and taking as much as a year to prepare and two years to sail. Their rationale was diplomatic, enabling the Yung-lo emperor to declare his enthronement and demonstrate his suzerainty over other Asian states, as well as providing passage for foreign envoys bearing tribute to the Chinese throne; but it was also economic, as a considerable

⁵⁹ Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, pp. 3, 146–47, 164, 169.

amount of lucrative state trading was enacted along the way. It was said that the mountain of Chinese goods that one of the expeditions unloaded in one Indian port was so great that three months were needed just to price everything. After 1433, however, state maritime undertakings ceased.

Cheng Jo-tseng was engaged to assist in devising policies to deal with piracy in the 1560s. He proved to be a close observer of maritime shipping, just as he was of the boats on Lake T'ai. His list of types of sea-going junks provides less detail than his list of lake boats, but is still of some interest. The list begins with what Cheng calls Hsin-hui boats and Tung-kuan boats, named after the two counties outside Canton where they were built. It then offers the more figurative names by which other types were known: "great prosperity boats" (*ta-fu ch'uan*, probably the largest maritime cargo vessels), "reed-skimming boats" (*ts'ao-p'ieh ch'uan*), "open sea boats" (*hai-ts'ang ch'uan*), "wave-cutting boats" (*k'ai-lang ch'uan*), "high-willow rudder-boats" (*kao-ch'i shao-ch'uan*), "tilted-bridge boats" (*ch'i-ch'iao ch'uan*), "azure-mountain boats" (*ts'ang-shan ch'uan*), eight-oar boats (*pa-chiang ch'uan*), "falcon boats" (*ying-ch'uan*), fishing boats (*yü-ch'uan*), "centipede boats" (*wu-kung ch'uan*), "two-prowed boats" (*liang-i'ou ch'uan*), "net boats" (*wang-ch'uan*), and "sand boats" (*sha-ch'uan*).⁶⁰ The sea-going junks that have been most studied are the so-called "treasure ships" (*pao-ch'uan*) that sailed on the Cheng Ho expeditions. At their fastest, these ships, with a burthen of 1,000 English tons, could sail 215 kilometers a day, maintaining a speed of 5.75 knots. The average distance the expeditions covered in a day was more on the order of 165 kilometers a day, sailing at a speed of 4.4 knots.⁶¹ These ships were built in the government shipyards at Lung-chiang on the south bank of the Yangtze River outside Nanking. After the last expedition returned in 1431, the Lung-chiang Shipyards received no further orders to build vessels on this scale; within a generation, it seems, the knowledge of how to build such great ships was lost.

The navigational knowledge that made it possible to sail out of sight of land was not lost, however. Each of the Cheng Ho expeditions collected an enormous amount of information about sea routes and previously uncharted coastlines around southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. This information was compiled into route maps, star charts, and "compass-needle manuals" (*chen-ching*) or rutters (nautical route manuals giving compass directions). In these rutters, nautical routes were organized on the basis of intervals known as "shifts" (*keng*): at the end of each shift, the navigator was supposed to reset his course according to a new compass direction. In theory, a ship at

60 Cheng Jo-tseng, "T'ai-hu t'u," quoted in Ku Yen-wu, *T'ien-hsia chün-kuo li-ping shu*, 4, p. 3a-b.

61 J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan, Ying-yai Sheng-lan: 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores' [1433]* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 305, 308.

sea was expected to traverse a distance of 60 *li* (35 km) during one shift, though in practice the routes from the southeast coast out to Taiwan or the Pescadores were marked off in shifts of roughly thirty *li*.⁶²

The rutters of the official expeditions in the early fifteenth century underwent constant improvement. According to a later manuscript copy of a maritime rutter that appears to derive from the maps made on the Cheng Ho expeditions, "on repeated voyages were compared and corrected charts of the direction of the compass-needle and the guiding stars and a copy of a drawing of the configurations of the islands in the sea and the condition of the water."⁶³ Each expedition strove to improve the texts it was furnished with by collecting new data, which was processed back home by a cartographic office that provided the maps and rutters for commanders of the next voyage. If the office provided as many maps and rutters as there were ships in each expedition, these must have circulated well beyond the commanders' circle. The copies of the expeditionary charts were preserved in the Ministry of War until the turn of the sixteenth century, when Minister of War Liu Ta-hsia (1437–1516) had them burned.⁶⁴ The minister's map-burning was in keeping with the mood of the mid-Ming court, which maintained an inward-looking and defensive posture with regard to foreign relations and was uninterested in the opportunities for trade and diplomacy abroad that the early Ming had begun to explore. The knowledge was not lost within society, however. From the maritime route maps and rutters that were rediscovered and printed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is evident that hand-written and hand-corrected copies circulated among coastal navigators throughout the dynasty.⁶⁵

In 1570, the Ming state found itself in need of the knowledge that it had once commanded regarding nautical transport. The Yellow River breached a dike at the north end of Nan Chihli that spring and flooded the Grand Canal. Eight hundred boats carrying tribute grain to Peking sank. The first official response was to require that grain boats thenceforth be loaded before the end of the lunar year so that they could make the northward journey before the spring floods hit the canal system.⁶⁶ But such an order was good only in the future. The present reality in 1570 was that the main transportation

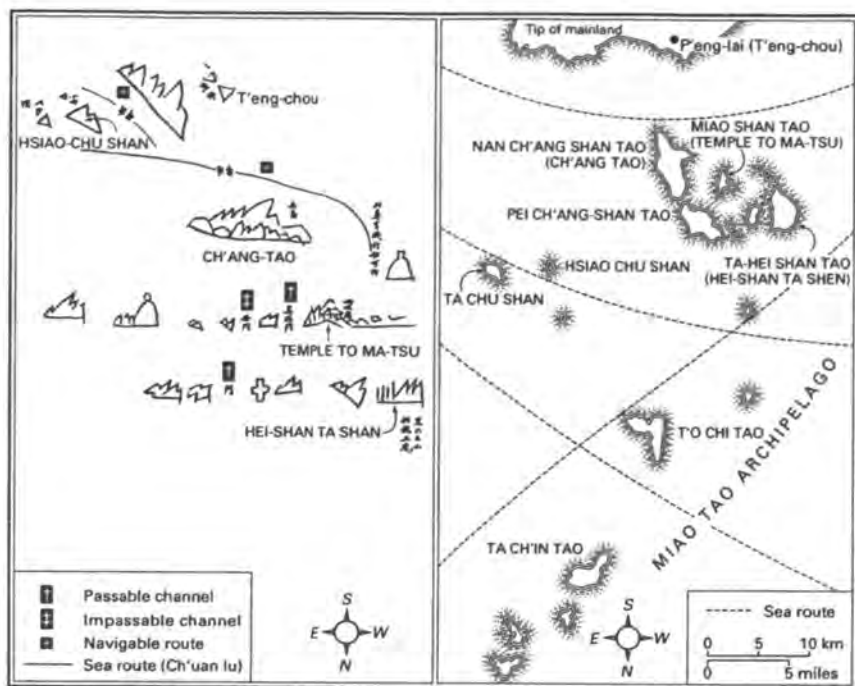
62 Hsiang Ta, *Liang-chung hai-tao chen-ching* (Peking, 1961), p. 6.

63 "Shun-feng hsiang-sung" rutter, quoted in Mills, *Ma Huan*, p. 240. This rutter is reproduced in Hsiang, *Liang-chung hai-tao chen-ching*.

64 Ray Huang, *China: a macro history* (Armonk, 1988), p. 156.

65 The first such printed rutter, *Tu-hai fang-ch'eng* (Route for crossing the ocean), was published in Fukien in 1537; it is examined in T'ien Ju-k'ang, "Tu-hai fang-ch'eng – Chung-kuo ti i pen k'o-yin ti shui-lu p'u." In *Explorations in the History of Science and Technology in China*, eds. Li Guohao, et al. (Shanghai, 1982), pp. 300–08. This rutter is discussed further in the later section on maritime trade.

66 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 142; the court had issued a similar order in 1564.



Map 10.7. Sixteenth century mariner's chart (left) of the navigation route through the Hai-hsia Miao-tao Archipelago north of Shantung, compared with modern map

artery of the dynasty was severed. Neither food nor any other goods could get to the capital by the accustomed route. Desperate to find a solution to this problem, the court in 1571 ordered Shantung Governor Liang Meng-lung (1527–1602) to find a sea route that would carry the grain shipment from Huai-an around the Shantung peninsula to the port at Tientsin. Liang needed information regarding the sea route and posted public notices offering to buy such information. Through the same method of public notification he recruited volunteers for two test runs that summer. The first flotilla of five ships took forty-five days to sail from Huai-an to Tientsin; the second flotilla of three, starting further up the coast at Chiao-chou Bay (site of present-day Ch'ing-tao), took thirty-five days to reach Tientsin. Three hundred boats were reported to have made the trip the following year, without mishap. The loss of seven grain boats in 1573 provided the opportunity for political opponents of the sea-route advocates to have the sea route for the grain tribute shut down.⁶⁷ By this time, the Grand Canal had been restored to something approaching normal.

67 DMB, pp. 899–900; regarding the flooding of the Yellow River in 1570, see p. 1108.

The ban on maritime activity was lifted, however, and maritime trade revived. Clearance for the trade had really come three years earlier when Fukien Governor T'u Tse-min successfully petitioned the newly enthroned Lung-ch'ing emperor to ease the restrictions on ocean travel and to legalize (and tax) maritime merchants working out of Chang-chou. Both T'u Tse-min and Liang Meng-lung were simply asking that the government extend legal recognition to activity that was already going on illicitly. Liang Meng-lung would hardly have been successful in gaining the information he requested through public notice were there no ships or sailors putting to sea despite the ban. Huang Pien, the author of a commercial route book published the year the Yellow River flooded, acknowledged that the Shantung coastal route was indeed being used prior to the lifting of the maritime ban. He warned against the sea route, however, but for reasons of danger, not illegality: "The sea wind is not constant. When you meet a wind, the sailing may be swift but it is also dangerous; and when there is no wind, reaching one's destination is difficult. Travelers are advised to take a different route."⁶⁸ The advice assumes that some travelers, meaning merchants, went to sea.

TRAVEL

The Ming became the great age of travel. The mobility that travel implied was not part of the imperial plan. At the start of the dynasty, the emperor Hung-wu made travel a matter of state certification: only officials on state business and merchants licensed by the state were permitted to travel, and only the former were allowed to use state transportation facilities. To pass through a gate or ford or cross a border required a government route certificate (*lu-yin*); the penalty for doing so without one was eighty strokes. One could legally cross a county boundary without papers only if he went no greater distance from his place of residence than 100 *li* (58 km). Circumventing the gates or fords, which controlled the key points in the transportation network, meant an additional ten strokes. Traveling with false papers increased the penalty by yet another ten. Finally, leaving China without imperial authorization was a capital crime. Coastal boat traffic was permitted so long as it sailed in sight of land; to sail out of sight was deemed leaving China, and the penalties applied.⁶⁹ These laws effectively restricted freedom of travel to within one's county of residence.

68 Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, p. 153.

69 Wu Chi-hua, "Ming-tai hai-chin yü tui-wai feng-so cheng-ts'e ti lien-huan-hsing," *Ming-shih yen-chi lun-i-t'ung*, ed. Wu Chih-ho (Taipei, 1985), Vol. 2, pp. 132-34.

The laws remained unaltered through the dynasty, but they quickly became a dead letter. What rendered them unrealistic, and almost impossible to enforce, was the economic pressure forcing large numbers of people to move. The pressure touched an artist like Tai Chin (1388–1462), for instance, who was obliged for professional and political reasons to travel extensively between Hangchow, Nanking, Peking, and Yunnan, seeking patronage. The mid-Ming scholar, Lang Ying, declared that Tai must have covered 100,000 *li* in the course of his career.⁷⁰ In terms of sheer numbers, the greatest mass of economic migrants in the Ming were peasants, who moved westward into less populated parts of China throughout the dynasty. Some of these migrants were moved in Hung-wu and Yung-lo relocation schemes designed to bring underutilized land under cultivation and to relieve population pressure in the eastern core. But this tiny minority of peasants bearing government travel documents was negligible within the much larger tide of incessant movement that sought to find a balance between land and labor.

Others traveled as well: merchants most conspicuously, but also scholars, gentry tourists, and pilgrims. It should be noted that most of these professional travelers were male. As the mother of the great later-Ming traveler and geographer, Hsü Hung-tsu, remarked to him when she released him from further family obligations so that he could pursue his travels, “to commit oneself to the four quarters is a man’s business.”⁷¹

Commercial travel

Itinerant merchants were to be seen everywhere, and in increasingly large numbers as the dynasty proceeded. A sixteenth-century stele commemorating the building of a fort at Shui-ch’üan, an important transportation center on the old silk route 150 kilometers downriver from Lanchow, describes merchants passing through Shui-ch’üan as “coming and going like shooting stars, . . . arriving and then setting off again without taking a day’s rest.”⁷²

Mastering the obstacle of distance was a key factor in the lives of successful merchants. Merchants from the prefecture of Hui-chou south of Nanking, who by the middle of the Ming were identified as one of the leading merchant groups operating in the national market, established themselves in part by being able to ship local products that were in considerable demand elsewhere

70 Quoted in Mary Ann Rogers, “Visions of grandeur: the life and art of Dai Jin.” In *Painters of the great Ming: the imperial court and the Zhe school*, ed. Richard M. Barnhart (Dallas, 1993), p. 129. Rogers has, in fact, organized Tai’s biography in relation to his many places of residence.

71 Cited in the tomb record by Ch’en Han-hui, in Hsü Hung-tsu, *Hsü Hsia-ke’o-yu-chi* (Shanghai, 1980), p. 1184.

72 Quoted in Ch’en Ch’i, ed. *Kansu kung-lu chiao-i’ung shih* (Peking, 1987), p. 126.



Map 10.8. Routes out of Hui-chou Prefecture

in Chiang-nan, like tea and wood, out to those markets. Transporting these goods was a challenge. Although Hui-chou was drained by rivers that flowed in all directions to the markets where Hui-chou merchants sold their goods, items like tea and wood were bulky and required resourcefulness to move; once moved, however, they fetched great profits. Thus, the genealogy of a Hui-chou lineage surnamed Fan celebrated three poor brothers at the turn of the fifteenth century who rose to great wealth in the lumber business by picturing their efforts in getting wood and other commodities to market, “riding on their bamboo raft, passing through dam locks during the night, their trees floating along beside them. [Sometimes] the raft was so full that they

barely had room for their bodies. To go ashore, they had to clamber over the trees.”⁷³

Commercial travel could be dangerous. Virtuous widows' biographies in the early Ming often reveal that their widowhood derived from being married to a merchant who died while traveling. The gazetteer of Yangchow tells of a widow of the fourteenth century “whose husband went off to pursue commerce and drowned.” Another biography in the same source tells of a woman whose husband drowned going upriver to trade in Chü-jung county just outside Nanking.⁷⁴ Then there were the human hazards. Stories of boatmen in league with robbers, especially in the more desolate parts of the country, abounded to give taste to the fear that travel could invoke among the more timid.⁷⁵

To those with little experience of travel, itinerant life seemed a dismal prospect. A gazetteer compiler from eastern Hu-kuang expressed this attitude in 1531 when he observed that the local people “resist the lure of commerce and fear to travel afar as merchants, and would rather die in a ditch of starvation than become bandits,”⁷⁶ as though the itinerancy of bandits and merchants was somehow of a single nature. Earlier in the dynasty, one does not have to go as far afield as Hu-kuang to discover a popular disinclination to engage in itinerant commerce. In the rural area just south of Soochow, according to the Wu-chiang gazetteer of 1488, local people “do not travel great distances. Merchants grimace when they have to go more than a hundred *li* from home, leaving their families to stick to their home villages and carry on the farming. . . . Those who go off as merchants to other places, leaving their homes in search of profit and letting the years pass without ever returning, are looked on as faithless men.” But the cultural values expressed in this passage were to change as the economic advantages of commerce became more evident and perhaps as commercial travel became an easier proposition: in 1548, when the next Wu-chiang gazetteer was compiled, this passage was removed.⁷⁷

A passage from the same decade of the 1540s in the gazetteer of the north China prefecture of Ho-chien (which included Tientsin) provides a rich sense of the extent to which merchants by this time were engaging in spatially

73 Quoted in Harriet Zurndorfer, *Change and continuity in Chinese local history: the development of Hui-chow prefecture, 800 to 1800* (Leiden, 1989), p. 96.

74 *Yangchow fu-chih* (1733), 34, pp. 5a, 5b.

75 E.g., Chu Kuo-chen, *Yung-ch'uanghsiao-p'in*, ch. 17, quoted in Chang Cheng-ming and Hsüeh Hui-lin, *Ming-Ch'ing Chin shang tz'u-liao hsüan-pien* (Tai-yüan, 1989), p. 116.

76 T'ung ch'eng-hsü, *Mien-yang chih* (1531), 6, p. 12a.

77 Mo Tan, *Wu-chiang chih* (1488), 5, p. 26b, quoted in Brook, *Geographical sources of Ming-Qing history*, p. 17. The 1548 gazetteer was not actually published until 1561.

extensive networks of trade:⁷⁸ “The merchants who transport commodities within Ho-chien deal in silk fabrics, grain, salt, iron, and wood. Silk merchants come from Nanking, Soochow, and Lin-ch’ing. Grain merchants travel the imperial highways from Wei-hui and Tz’u-chou and go as far as the region along the river at Tientsin, buying up grain when the harvest is good and selling it when the harvest is poor. Ironmongers deal mostly in agricultural implements, coming here in small carts from Lin-ch’ing and Po-t’ou. The salt merchants come from Ts’ang-chou and Tientsin, the wood merchants from Chen-ting. Those who sell porcelain and lacquerware come from Jao-chou [the prefecture in which Ching-te-chen was located] and Hui-chou [where lacquer was manufactured]. As for local merchants, most come from the prefectures and counties north of the Yellow River and are known as ‘shop households’ (*p’u-hu*).” The author then explains which Ho-chien counties are on the Grand Canal and are therefore able to ship grain to Peking by water, and which counties transport their grain overland.⁷⁹ The references to the Grand Canal and the imperial highways reflect the reliance of commercial travel on the transportation infrastructure built and maintained by the state. Without the state’s investment in this infrastructure, Ho-chien could not have afforded commerce on the scale that it enjoyed.

Once commercial networks were established and patterns of commercial production and exchange set, even places ill-served by transportation could become drawn into regional and national markets if their products were in demand elsewhere. For example, Yung-an county, which lay deep in the hinterland of western Fukien, had the modest advantage of being situated on the Min River system that flowed down to the provincial capital of Fuchou, but the provincial capital was fully 200 kilometers away. The more southerly prefectural capital of Chang-chou was a little closer, but getting there involved a difficult overland crossing to the Chiu-lung River system. Despite Yung-an’s distance from major distribution centers, however, the county was a place where “many of the common people engage in crafts”⁸⁰ that were traded out of the county. In other words, according to the 1526 prefectural gazetteer, transportation links had overcome geographical isolation.⁸¹ The same development may be observed of other counties in the Fukien interior. Further up a different branch of the Min River system was Chien-yang, a major producer of paper and books. (The nearest courier station, 20 kilometers down-river, was called Yeh-fang I, or Paper Factory Station.) The water route from Chien-yang to Nanking, with some portages

78 See Map 6, “Routes within Northern Chih-li” on p. 614.

79 P’an Shen, *Ho-chien fu-chih* (1540), 7, pp. 3b–4a.

80 Cheng Ch’ing-yün and Hsin Shao-tso, *Yen-p’ing fu-chih* (1526), 1, p. 13a.

81 See Map 5, “Routes within Fukien Province” on p. 610.

along the way, was over a thousand kilometers,⁸² yet the demand for books in Nanking meant that Chien-yang publishers found it profitable to ship their books to consumers in Chiang-nan.

By moving goods from places of production to places of consumption, often well separated one from the other, Ming merchants enlarged the volume of goods in circulation and expanded the territorial sphere within which goods could circulate economically. In economic terms, and possibly in physical terms as well, as routes became more commercialized and better serviced by ferries and inns, distances decreased.

Gentry travel

The gentry were travelers by profession. As examination candidates they had to travel first to the provincial capital, and then, if successful, to the national capital. Once appointed to office in the field administration, they had to travel often great distances to take up their posts and, as long as their careers advanced, had to do so several times in their lives. As officials, their travel was handled by the courier service. While still only examination candidates, their travel was not so handled, though the more aggressive were able to brow-beat station masters into assisting them on their way.⁸³

The gentry also traveled outside their official capacities. Most noticeably from the mid-sixteenth century onward, more and more well-educated men preferred the rigors and rewards of travel to those of office. They traveled to visit friends, to search out teachers and like-minded scholars, and to visit scenic and historic sites that previously they had only read about. The late Ming became the great age of gentry touring. Thus it was that the eminent poet and scholar, Yüan Hung-tao, in a short essay he wrote in 1596 about the beautiful sights of Soochow's Tung-t'ing Lake, could declare that the Soochow gentry loved to travel and that "this is their sole obsession."⁸⁴

Part of the urge to tour was edificatory. Gentlemen of leisure wanted to see the famed beautiful sights that ancient writers had extolled, but see also the historical and artistic artifacts that high culture regarded as significant. Travel was an integral element in scholarly cultivation. As a seventeenth-century scholar-official put it, "A person who has not read ten thousand books and

82 The route from Nanking to Chien-yang is given in Tan-i-tzu, *T'ien-hsia lu-ch'eng t'u-yin*, pp. 404-05.

83 Ichisada Miyasaki, *China's Examination Hell: the civil service examinations of imperial China*, trans. Conrad Schirokauer (Tokyo, 1976).

84 Yüan Hung-tao, *Yüan Hung-tao chi chien-chiao* (Peking, 1981), Vol. 1, p. 164. On the culture of obsessionism in the late Ming, see Judith Zeitlin, "The petrified heart: Obsession in Chinese literature, art, and medicine," *Late Imperial China* 12, No. 1 (June, 1991), pp. 1-26. Zeitlin refers to Yüan in this essay, though the obsession for travel is one of the few she neglects to mention.

has not traveled ten thousand *li* cannot consider himself an accomplished gentleman.”⁸⁵ The late-Ming gentry thus set off in search of ancient battle-grounds, studios of famous scholars, scenes immortalized by T’ang poets; they were on the look-out for fine T’ang calligraphy, good Sung architecture, prized paintings by Yüan artists. In an age when museums were unheard of, eminent Buddhist monasteries preserved much of the material record of China’s past and were much visited for this reason. Their Sung buildings, their paintings and calligraphy, their steles penned by great writers were sought out in the late Ming by those who wished to identify with the cultural tradition these artifacts expressed. Whether those on tour really understood what they saw is another matter. The flood of gentry tourists to Nanking in the 1590s prompted Feng Meng-chen to observe with some contempt that all they wanted to do was see famous sites without gaining any real appreciation or understanding of what the sites signified.⁸⁶

The travel that the age made possible inspired not just empty-headed tourism in the sixteenth century, but a rise of a new trend toward scholarly research based not solely on ancient texts but also on personal experience. The primacy of texts was not rejected by this trend, but texts did become vulnerable to examination and revision on the strength of what scholars could determine by collecting data and visiting places to which classical texts referred. Li Shih-chen (1518–93) authored his great pharmacopoeia, *Pen-ts’ao kang-mu*, on the strength of travels to examine the 1,892 medicinal substances listed therein. Hsü Kuang-ch’i (1562–1633) compiled his *Nung-cheng ch’üan-shu* (*Complete handbook of agricultural administration*) with the classical agricultural texts at his elbow, but he supplemented and challenged canonical testimony with evidence of his own based on his experience in the fields of Chiang-nan. Sung Ying-hsing adopted a similarly respectful but critical attitude in *T’ien-kung k’ai-wu* (*Exploitation of the works of nature*), his survey of technology published in 1637. The most prominent writer of the late Ming to use travel as a mode of scholarly investigation is certainly Hsü Hung-tsu (1586–1641). Hsü undertook seventeen excursions from his native Chiang-yin county on the Yangtze estuary between 1613 and 1640 to visit sites of historical and geological interest throughout central and south China, traveling as far as Yunnan province. In his diary entries for 850 of the days he spent in travel, as well as in his essays, he provides detailed accounts of his examinations of these sites, as well as his evaluations of data in texts as old as *Yü kung* (*Tribute of Yü*)

85 Huang Liu-hung, *A complete book concerning happiness and benevolence*, trans. Djang Chu (Tucson, 1984), p. 5.

86 T’ieh-chou Hsing-hai, *Chin-shan chih-lüe* (1681), 1: *I’ien-ti chiu-o*, p. 4a.

and as recent as contemporary gazetteers.⁸⁷ The acquisition of practical knowledge through travel, and its application to textual knowledge, was continued beyond the fall of the Ming, most notably by Ku Yen-wu in the great historical and geographical studies he undertook in the third quarter of the seventeenth century.

Pilgrimage

Buddhist pilgrims were among the most persistent travelers of the Ming dynasty. Clergy and laity both undertook frequent travel to religious sites for the purposes of venerating deities associated with those sites or of receiving instruction or inspiration from living teachers. As information regarding lay pilgrimage in the Ming is scanty, the observations that follow are largely restricted to ecclesiastic pilgrimage.

In the early years of the dynasty, many monks were obliged to wander for want of access to permanent residence in a monastery. For monks, ecclesiastic mobility was a matter of survival. For the state, it was a matter of anxiety. As it was, becoming a monk implied a challenge to the hegemony of the Confucian order of social and moral life – the reproduction of the male line and the duties associated with the work of maintaining a patriline and, by extension, the social order. But clerical vagabondage was watched as a more explicit challenge to the hegemony of the Confucian state, the goal of which was to fix everyone in a place and a status that were permanent, the only change being the turning of the generations. The monk did not fit into this model of perpetual repetition, since he extricated himself from that cycle and, not having reproduced, was not replaced in the cadastral registers by someone bearing the same surname and owning the same property all over again. He went somewhere else and did something else. Many a memorialist of the fifteenth century complained about wandering monks with a passion that went deeper than an objection to pilgrimage as a form of religious training, which it was.

The religious sanctity surrounding pilgrimage as a mode of religious cultivation provided Ming monks in most times with a convenient defense when challenged about their movements. Pilgrimage was of many types. There was the novice's first stage of wandering in search of a teacher who would instruct and ordain him (or, to put it less ideologically, in search of an institution that could provide him with food and shelter). For a monk

87 Regarding Hsü Hung-tsu's biography and work, see Li Chi, *The travel diaries of Hsü Hsia-k'o* (Hong Kong, 1974); T'ang Hsi-jen and Yang Wen-heng, *Hsü Hsia-k'o chi ch'i yu-chi yen-chiu* (Peking, 1987). Hsü's travel diaries plus affiliated texts have been reprinted in Hsü Hung-tsu, *Hsü Hsia-k'o yu-chi*, 3 vols.



Map 10.9. Journey of Hsü Hung-tsu to Yunnan, 1636-40

further on in his training, travel to holy sites was an important form of pilgrimage, both for his cultivation of wisdom through suffering (Buddhism conventionally recognized travel as a form of suffering) and for his reputation as a monk of broad experience and, hence, broad understanding. The biography of almost every noteworthy Ming monk includes reference to extensive travels. For example, according to a text of 1535, Pao-shan Ting-yü, a monk who revived a small monastery in Nanking in 1484, "traveled to all the famous mountains and trekked across half the empire" prior to taking up this worthy project.⁸⁸ For the contemporary reader, this simple description imparted to Ting-yü a reputation as a serious cleric.

Monks were uniquely free to travel. Pressure to get itinerant monks into monasteries relaxed in the sixteenth century, such that monks in the latter half of the dynasty felt no restrictions about movement. This seems to be indicated in a popular almanac of 1599, which includes among its form letters one that a Buddhist novice could use to invite a friend to accompany him on a pilgrimage.⁸⁹ As one gentry writer noted in 1638, "For no-one is travel as convenient as it is for a monk." After cataloguing the various encumbrances of secular life from which monks are free, this writer observed that they can "come and go at will, staying at old monasteries and consorting with like-minded men. For this reason, there are many monks traveling about the realm."⁹⁰ The tinge of envy in this remark suggests that most gentry, tied by their multiple social obligations, may have found it more difficult to indulge in what the great Yunnanese master, Chien-yüeh Tu-t'i, described as "a love of travel and sightseeing so strong that I couldn't stop my feet."⁹¹ Tu-t'i himself is a good example of the late-Ming phenomenon of a mobile clergy. In the 1630s, he trekked his way with a group of novices from Yunnan to the Yangtze delta, went north to Wu-t'ai Mountain in northern Shansi, then back south to Chiang-nan. Far from exceptional, Tu-t'i's travels were part of a pilgrimage pattern that brought hundreds of Yunnanese monks eastward in the last century of the Ming dynasty and placed many among the upper ranks of clergy.⁹²

The rise of pilgrimage travel among monks alarmed some Buddhists. In his rules for novices, the prominent Buddhist master, Lien-ch'ih Chu-hung (1535–1615), cautioned them against extended pilgrimage at an early stage in training, when "one is young and one's precepts not firmly established."⁹³

88 Ko Yin-liang, ed., *Chin-ling san-ch'ia chih* (1607), 36, p. 1b.

89 Yü Hsiang-tou, ed., *W'an-yung cheng-tsong* (1599), 39, pp. 6b–7a.

90 Lang-yün Hai-chu, *Yün-yu ts'ao* (1638), Wu's preface, p. 1a.

91 Chien-yüeh Tu-t'i, *I-meng man-yen* (K'ang-hsi era; rpt. P'u-t'ien, ca. 1987), p. 1.

92 Ch'en Yüan, *Ming-chi Tien Ch'ien fo-chiao k'ao* (1940; rpt. Peking, 1962).

93 Hsüan-hua, *A General Explanation of "The Essentials of the Sramanera Vinaya and Rules of Deportment"* (San Francisco, 1975), p. 84.

A male novice should only go on short journeys with wholesome companions and with a fixed destination, and females should not travel at all, especially to such sites of popular pilgrimage as P'u-t'o Island and T'ien-t'ai Mountain.⁹⁴ Extended pilgrimage could indeed be a daunting and difficult experience that some monks preferred to avoid. Chu-hung warned that the wandering novice had to "bear hunger and thirst, endure cold and heat, and experience every conceivable hardship."⁹⁵ In addition to the physical hazards, as Chien-yüeh Tu-t'i himself discovered when he lost his luggage while trying to book passage on a boat on the wharf at Tan-yang, itinerant monks in the late Ming were an easy target for theft and intimidation. On the other hand, Chu-hung also recognized that travel was an essential component in the process of finding a teacher. In a short essay entitled "*Hsing-chiao chu-shan*" ("Going by foot, residing on a mountain"), he criticizes the extremes of "preserving your fortune without going out of the gate" on the one hand, and "roaming recklessly north and south for your entire life" on the other; yet he concedes that "before your mind is enlightened you should travel a thousand *li* or even ten thousand *li* to place yourself close to men of knowledge. What point is there in wallowing in your own stupidity and being satisfied with what you have? Once you have sought out a teacher and asked about the Way to resolve the affair of life and death, however, then what point is there in gazing at landscapes, except to brag about the extent of your travels?"⁹⁶ Pilgrimage thus had its place in ecclesiastic training.

China's sacred geography long before the Ming dynasty was oriented to the ancient places of reverence – the "five peaks" (*wu yüeh*) dedicated to the mythic civilizational founders, and the thirty-six main and seventy-two lesser "caves to heaven" (*tung-t'ien*) by which Taoism mapped China's topography onto Heaven. While these sites continued to attract pilgrims, ecclesiastic pilgrimage in the Ming was arranged in relation to Buddhist sites, some of which overlapped pre-Buddhist holy places and others of which were constructed without having to rely on earlier systems of topographical reference. Buddhist sites did not cohere in a single spatial system. Chan Buddhism prior to the Ming had a system of major sites known as the "five mountains and ten monasteries" (*wu-shan shih-ch'a*), but this formula was not widely absorbed into popular lore. The only common grouping of Buddhist sites was the "four famous mountains" (*ssu ta ming-shan*): Wu-t'ai Mountain, P'u-t'o Island, O-mei Mountain in Szechwan, and Chiu-hua Mountain southwest of Nanking. All were located in relatively inaccessible places, and all were

94 Yün-ch'i Chu-hung, *Hsiao-i wu-ai an-lu* (1624), rpt. in his *Yün-ch'i fa-hui* (1897), pp. 52, 72.

95 Yün-ch'i Chu-hung, *Chu-ch'wang sui-pi* (Wan-li era), rpt. in his *Yün-ch'i fa-hui* (Nanking, 1897), p. 42b.

96 Yün-ch'i Chu-hung, *Chu-ch'wang sui-pi*, p. 49a-b.

bodhimandas (*tao-ch'ang*), places where Buddhist deities had manifested themselves: Manjusri at Wu-t'ai, Avalokitesvara (Kuan-yin) at P'u-t'o, Samantabhadra at O-mei, and Ksitagarbha (Ti-tsang) at Chiu-hua. In the words of the prominent lay Buddhist, T'u Lung, these were places where "the old Buddhas have incarnated and manifested themselves to aid in the propagation of Buddhism and bring all living beings to salvation."⁹⁷ They did not form a system, however, and pilgrims did not have to visit all four in order to feel that they had completed their pilgrimage project, though most eminent monks of the Ming traveled to at least the first three.⁹⁸

The routes that pilgrims followed between regions naturally traced the well-established courier routes that most other travelers used. Yet the movement of pilgrims within regions tended to go against the flow of commercial movement. Merchants drew resources from the rural areas down into regional centers, whereas pilgrims moved outward from the administrative seats into the semi-periphery where most holy mountains were located. Pilgrims may have walked hill paths that most travelers never used, yet their common reliance on standard routes to cross the country may have meant that the practice of pilgrimage was able to expand in the late Ming because of the extent to which the transportation system had developed by this time.

A devout layman might also take up the same sort of extended pilgrimage that a monk undertook as a demonstration of his personal commitment to Buddhism. A Buddhist devotional text describes such a man, a mid-Ming leather-worker from Honan named Yen Chiang, who, in his middle years, quit his occupation, which Buddhism regarded as odious because it involved the taking of life, and took up the life of the permanent pilgrim, carrying nothing but the Diamond Sutra on the road and chanting Amitabha's name incessantly.⁹⁹ For most of the laity, however, pilgrimage was organized as group travel rather than as a personal religious exercise. These mass pilgrimages were organized at the village level, paid for in advance by joint subscription, and oriented toward one key pilgrimage site. Often, it seems, they were under the direction of women; in fact, pilgrimage was the only opportunity for extended travel available to women.¹⁰⁰

97 T'u Lung, *Pai-yü chi* (1600; rpt. Taipei, 1977), 5, p. 31a.

98 Wu-t'ai, P'u-t'o, and O-mei are frequently listed together in monks' biographies as the most important pilgrimage sites they had visited; e.g., the biography of Wu-cho Ai-shan (fl. 1600) in Lu Hsiung, *Lou-hsien chib* (1788), 30, p. 9a.

99 Chou K'o-fu, *Chin-kang ch'ih-yen chi* (1799), from a story dated to 1518.

100 For a fictional portrayal of mass pilgrimage, see Glen Dudbridge, "Women pilgrims to T'ai Shan: some pages from a seventeenth-century novel." In *Pilgrims and sacred sites in China*, ed. Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü (Berkeley, 1992), pp. 39-64.

Knowledge of routes

The publication, in 1570, of Huang Pien's route book, *I-t'ung lu-ch'eng t'u-chi* (*The comprehensive illustrated route book*), marked a major turning point in the history of transportation in the Ming. Prior to 1570, route information was restricted knowledge in the dual sense of being restricted to specialists and of being knowledge limited to one route or set of routes. With the appearance of the route book, knowledge about the existence and disposition of particular routes was transformed into public knowledge, accessible to anyone who could read. These pieces of information became a comprehensive whole rather than remaining disparate.

In late-Ming route books, traces may be found of the forms that route knowledge took before 1570. One of these is the mnemonic verse listing places along specific routes. A "Song of the route between the two capitals" in the 1599 almanac *Wan-yung cheng-tsung* (*The correct source for a myriad practical uses*) describes the Grand Canal route from Nanking to Peking in thirty-five lines of seven characters each; it finishes with the observation that travelers using the route should become familiar with this text. A "Song of the essentials of the water courier stations" in a route book of 1626 follows the same method in relation to the stations along the canal, in twenty-six lines.¹⁰¹

A second form of route knowledge prior to the publication of route books was the route map (*ch'eng-t'u*). The route map has a history that goes back at least to the tenth century, although the only route maps that survive today date from the Ch'ing. Folded in accordion fashion, the route map depicted a route as a horizontal straight line running unbroken from the front of the map to the back. Along this line were marked the towns, courier stations, and main topographical features through which the traveler would pass; distances between these points might also be marked. The Ming state probably produced this sort of simple route map of the Grand Canal and probably as well of the main trunk routes of the courier system for the use of its officials, as such guides in handwritten form have survived from the Ch'ing.¹⁰² It appears that route maps also circulated among merchants, though, again, none survives. We have only Huang Pien's observation in the preface to his *Comprehensive illustrated route book* that he obtained copies of route maps from merchants from all over the country when he was in Soochow and used these as primary material for his book.¹⁰³

The third form in which route knowledge was published prior to Huang Pien's guidebook was in the form of written text describing routes in terms

101 Yü Hsiang-tou, *Wan-yung cheng-tsung*, 2, pp. 402-b; Tan-i-tzu, *T'ien-hsia lu-ch'eng t'u-yin*, pp. 397-98.

102 Brook, *Geographical sources*, pp. 12-13.

103 Quoted in Brook, *Geographical sources*, p. 4.

of a series of sequential place names interspersed with the distances in *li* between one place and the next. The earliest Ming text that preserves this format is the government service handbook, *Ta Ming kuan-chih* (*The bureaucratic system of the Ming dynasty*). Lists of the stations and county seats along the courier routes and the distances between them are given therein for the convenience of traveling officials. These lists did not remain restricted within the realm of state information, but were popularized in the late Ming by commercial publishers in such books as *The correct source for a myriad practical uses* just mentioned. The format was in turn adopted by Huang Pien when he devised his *Comprehensive illustrated route book*.

Unlike the routes section of *The bureaucratic system of the Ming dynasty*, Huang Pien's innovative book was designed for the use of commercial travelers, not officials. Huang himself was a merchant from Hui-chou who had personal experience of many of the routes he chronicled. He was based in Soochow, presumably working there as an agent of his family's business, and published the book there. Given his experience and concern as an itinerant merchant, Huang focused on routes in Chiang-nan that were serviced by commercial transportation. He did, however, fulfill his promise to be comprehensive: he organized his information into 144 water and land routes that cover the entire realm. In addition to the place-and-distance listings of routes, Huang took the trouble to append advice regarding difficult turnings or alternate routes, as well as information regarding local sites, inns, ferries, and the security of routes depending on time of day or season of the year. This kind of information was gradually expanded in subsequent editions of his and other route books through the late Ming and early Ch'ing that moved the genre in the direction of the full-blown merchant manual.

The comprehensive illustrated route book begins with the official trunk routes out of Peking and Nanking in the first two *chüan*, followed by the structures of official route in each province in the third *chüan*, and elsewhere relies heavily on county seats and courier stations for place markers. Most of the routes in the latter half of the book are based in the Yangtze Valley, with the last two *chüan* devoted heavily to routes in and out of his home prefecture of Hui-chou, notably the connections between Hui-chou and Soochow. Officials could well profit from owning a copy of the book, as Huang insists in his postface, yet it was for merchants that he wrote. Lest we should be in any doubt about the book's principal readership, the editor of the 1635 edition put a new name on the title page: *K'o-shang i-lan shui-lu lu-ch'eng* (*Water and land routes at a glance for traveling merchants*).

Huang's was one of the two main route books written (and enthusiastically pirated) in the late Ming. The other was published variously as *Shih-shang lei-yao* (*Encyclopedia for gentry and merchants*), *Shih-shang yao-lan* (*Essentials for gentry*

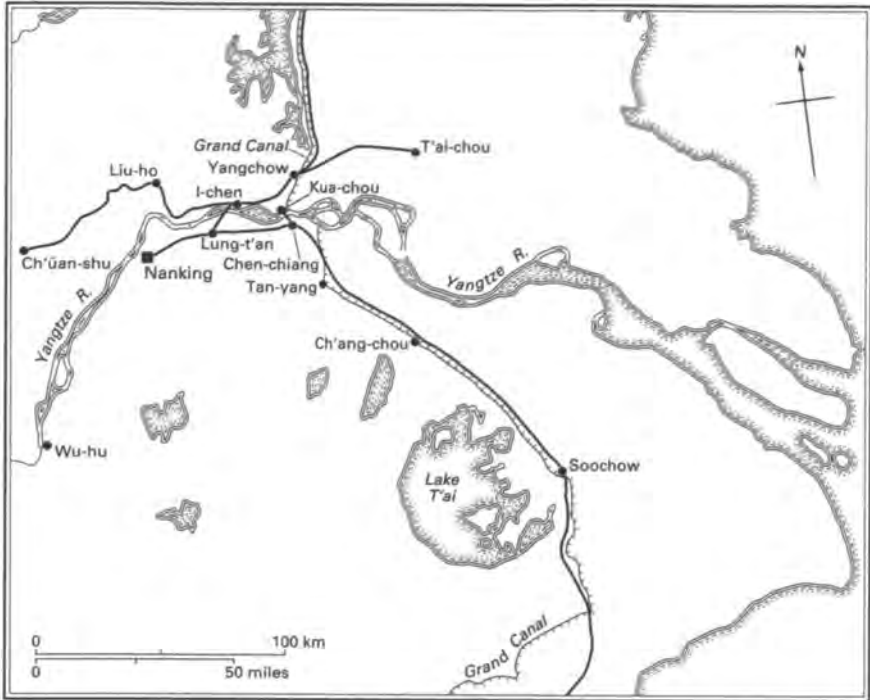
and merchants at a glance), and *T'ien-hsia shui-lu' u-yin* (*Illustrated guide to the routes of the realm*). Its earliest appearance, as the first half of the *Encyclopedia for gentry and merchants*, a four-*chüan* merchant manual by Ch'eng Ch'un-yü, dates to 1626, though there may have been an earlier edition. Both the author and preface-writer listed in the 1626 edition are, like Huang Pien, merchants hailing from Hui-chou, although the book's place of publication is Hangchow rather than Soochow. The book's Hui-chou/Hangchow identity is evident in its organization: the first eight routes start in Hui-chou, and the next five emanate out of Hangchow; thereafter, the reader is given routes from Ning-po, and only then, the routes from Soochow. The book contains a hundred routes, divided between fifty-three south of Yangtze ("Chiang-nan") and forty-seven north ("Chiang-pei"). Its focus nonetheless is on Chiang-nan, for most of the "Chiang-pei" routes lie within the portion of Nan Chihli north of the Yangtze. The decreasing density of routes outside Chiang-nan in both the Huang (144-route) and Ch'eng (100-route) texts reflects the pattern of commercial travel as experienced by Hui-chou merchants, the group most active in interregional trade in the late Ming, and for whom knowledge of routes had financial significance.

Rates of travel

Knowing routes enabled faster travel, especially when one was traveling on one's own. As already noted, those using the courier service had deadlines to meet and the facilities that would enable them to meet them. Those traveling privately did not. Route books appeared in the late Ming to improve the efficiency with which the private traveler could go from one place to another.

The rate at which people traveled in the Ming varied according to the form of transport taken and the pressure of time to reach one's destination. We can get a sense of one man's pace of travel from two travel essays written by the Kiangsi Neo-Confucian and cartographer, Lo Hung-hsien.¹⁰⁴ In the first of these essays, Lo describes his travels by boat in the Nanking-Yangchow region in the winter of 1539. He writes that it took a day and a half to go from Chen-chiang to the Lung-t'an courier station on the Yangtze River east of Nanking (a distance of 60 km); a day from Lung-t'an to I-chen (30 km); a night by overnight ferry from I-chen to Yangchow (40 km); two days from Yangchow to T'ai-chou (60 km); and two days from Liu-ho and Ch'üan-chiao (75 km). Lo's description suggests that he was traveling, not to

104 The two essays, "Tung-yu chi" and "Hsi-yu chi," constitute the fifth *chüan* of Lo Hung-hsien, *Nien-an wen-chi* (n.d.; rpt. Taipei, 1974). Distances in this and the following passages are taken from Huang Pien, *I-f'ung lu-cheng' u-chi*, pp. 2, 49, 144, 157, 162, 214.



Map 10.10. Journey of Lo Hung-hsien, 1539

see sights along the way, but to get from one place to the next, though under no great pressure of time. Traveling at an efficient, neither leisurely nor hurried, pace, Lo was covering close to 35 kilometers a day. His rate of travel was somewhat slower than Ch'oe Pu's journey from Ning-po to Hangchow, when he traveled 43 kilometers a day. Ch'oe's escort, however, was having to work to a tight schedule, whereas Lo was not traveling by deadline but simply trying to make reasonably good time.

In his second essay, Lo Hung-hsien recounts his travels by boat on Kiang-si's Kan River with friends in the summer of 1548, well down-river from the T'ien-kua Rapids where Ricci was thrown overboard. He says that they took eight days to go down-river from Chi-an to Hsin-kan, a distance of 140 kilometers; and five days to get from Hsin-kan to Feng-ch'eng, a distance of 95 kilometers. In both cases, this works out to a rate of almost 20 kilometers a day, roughly half the speed at which he was boating between Nanking and Yangchow. The difference would be due in part to the greater difficulty navigating the Kan River compared to the well-worn canal network in the Yangchow region. Lo's faster rate of travel in 1539 may also have been aided by

the fact that he was on official travel and could make use of the courier system, whereas, in 1548, he was traveling privately. He makes no reference in his second essay to courier stations, for instance, and notes as well that the trip from Hsin-kan to Feng-ch'eng involved passage on a merchant's boat.

Travel did not proceed as smoothly as the data from Lo's travel essays might suggest. The 35 kilometers rate of travel for his winter journey around the Yangchow region, it bears noting, does not include time lost when travel was not possible. In winter particularly, travel could readily be broken by adverse weather conditions. Lo mentions, for instance, that head winds prevented a westbound boat he was taking from Yangchow from reaching its destination, and that snow in Yangchow a month later shut down all boat traffic in the area for four days.¹⁰⁵

A Ming writer who has left detailed accounts of his travels is Hsü Hung-tsu (1586–1641). His voluminous travel diaries are unevenly useful for determining rates of travel, since his usual purpose was research, not efficient movement, but he did make one efficient journey: his last. He fell ill while sojourning in central Yunnan and was sent home in the summer of 1640 by a local prefect to Chiang-yin county at the mouth of the Yangtze River. The prefect provided him with a sedan-chair and travel expenses. Hsü went as far as Wu-ch'ang, a distance roughly estimated as 4,500 *li*, or 2,600 kilometers. Since it took Hsü's chair-bearers 150 days to cover this distance, his overland rate of travel amounted to about 17 kilometers a day. Compared to the Persian embassy's pace of 30 kilometers a day in 1420, this was slow by courier standards, though Hsü's progress was constrained by both rough terrain and Hsü's ill health. Once he reached Wu-ch'ang, an official there provided him with a boat and sent him down the Yangtze River to Chiang-yin. He covered that distance, just short of 3,000 *li* (1,700 km), in a mere six days, traveling at a rate of close to 280 kilometers a day.¹⁰⁶ Ch'oe Pu's rate on the Grand Canal in 1488, in contrast, was between 49 and 61 kilometers a day. The down-river route on the Yangtze was clearly the swiftest long-distance water route in China.

THE CIRCULATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge was recorded and circulated in Ming China in many forms: oral forms that entered texts only as mnemonic devices; written forms that transmitted information targeted to individuals; and printed forms that duplicated

105 Lo Hung-hsien, *Nien-an wen-chi*, 5, pp. 3b, 15a.

106 Details of the return journey are given in the biography by Wu Kuo-hua, in Hsü Hung-tsu, *Hsü Hsia-k'o-yu-chi*, p. 1189. Distances are based on those given in Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, pp. 2, 31, 70–71, 198–99; they are approximate.

texts and broadcast knowledge as widely as possible. Most Ming Chinese were illiterate, but that did not mean that written and printed forms of knowledge were unavailable to them. Scribes, public lecturers, and word of mouth succeeded in lowering the barrier that illiteracy placed between most people and the written or printed word. Oral, written, and printed forms of knowledge were not necessarily consecutive steps in the organization or dissemination of knowledge. They could be, but different types of knowledge were amenable to different modes of transmission, and different communications vehicles favored certain categories of information over others.

The administrative system was keenly aware of the need to communicate with the people, and the impossibility of relying solely on literate forms. For instance, when an illiterate wished to file a lawsuit at his county yamen, he was supposed to recite his case to a yamen secretary, who wrote it down in an "oral accusation register" (*k'ou-kao wen-p'u*).¹⁰⁷ When the emperor wished to address his people, he distributed the text of his address to his magistrates and had them distribute it to subordinates to recite it publicly so that all might hear and obey.

During his visit to China in 1488, the Korean, Ch'oe Pu, was impressed with the degree of literacy he encountered. He was in a good position to know, as he could not speak Chinese and had to rely on writing to communicate. He observed that many could read, "even village children, ferrymen, and sailors," those of whom literacy was least expected.¹⁰⁸ He made no comments with regard to female literacy, although some women were literate. In the early Ming, most references to female literacy link that skill to the attention of an educated father. For example, Ho Hui-lien's father taught her the *Analects* of Confucius and the *Classic of Filial Piety*; he delayed her marriage until she was twenty, marrying her finally to a poor scholar for whom she bought books by selling her jewelry.¹⁰⁹ The daughter of the military governor Ch'eng K'ai, who was married in 1393 at the age of seventeen, had an even more advanced education, for she was said to be "rather well versed in the *Shang shu* and the *Shih chi*," in addition to "having a virtuous face."¹¹⁰ Outside the narrow circle of the elite, it seems that few women controlled more than a basic functional literacy. The Hung-wu emperor discovered this in 1372 when he sent eunuchs to Soochow and Hangchow to recruit literate women for responsible posts in his harem, where they would serve as educators to his concubines. Forty-four were selected for this service and brought to

107 *Ta Ming ling*, included in *TMHT*, 177, p. 1.

108 Meskill, *Ch'oe Pu's Diary*, p. 155.

109 Liu Wu, *Hui-chou fu-chih* (1542), 11, p. 28b.

110 *Ch'ung-chou fu-chih* (1619), 10b, p. 93b.

Nanking. Only fourteen passed the written test that was set for them, however; the other thirty were judged as having levels of literacy below that required and were sent home.¹¹¹

A sign of the extent of literacy in the Ming is the scale of the publishing industry. The number and types of books in publication in the late Ming was beyond anything China had previously experienced. This was a development that rested on many factors: a greater number of literate people, a greater demand for canonical knowledge that could be used to pass the examinations, a greater interest in textualizing (and reading) noncanonical knowledge, an expanded commercial market for books. Coming from a culture in which printing was only just beginning to affect knowledge and make the possession of books in any numbers feasible, the Italian missionary Matteo Ricci was amazed at the turn of the seventeenth century by “the exceedingly large numbers of books in circulation here and the ridiculously low prices at which they are sold.”¹¹² Ricci did not exaggerate, for books published in the years he was in China did indeed “circulate among that generation.”¹¹³ But the boom in books was only one indicator that knowledge of all types was being recorded more frequently and transmitted more often and more widely than at any previous time in Chinese history.

The transmission of state documents

The Ming state was constantly transmitting information, both within its bureaucracy and to society at large. The Hung-wu emperor, especially after his first decade of rule, inundated officials and people alike with a constant flow of official documents instructing them in their duties. To ensure that these documents were in fact transmitted, the *Ming code* (*Minglü*) made the concealment of official documents punishable by eighty strokes of the heavy bamboo. Hung-wu evinces increasing frustration over the failure of his communications to achieve their intended effects later in his reign by superseding that punishment with death by slicing in article 60 of his first *Ta kao* (*Great admonitions*) of 1385.

Hung-wu's instructions involved an enormous communications burden. Directives and models had to be sent out, and responses from the field

111 Chu Yün-ming *Yehchi* (1511), rpt. in *Li-tai hsiao-shih* (Shanghai, 1940), p. 12a. Later emperors were less concerned about literacy in the palace. When chaste widows were conscripted in 1423 to train concubines in the Yung-lo harem, the qualification was childlessness, not literacy. Like literacy, though, that restriction was reduced within a year to the stipulation that they not bring their children into the palace.

112 Louis Gallagher, trans., *China in the sixteenth century: the journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583–1610* (New York, 1953), p. 21.

113 Meng Chün, *Kuang-chow chih* (1660), 9, p. 23a.

submitted and processed. To handle this burden, the emperor, in 1370, established an Office of Reports Inspection (*Ch'a-yen ssu*). Its principal task was to receive memorials from officials throughout the realm and convey them to the throne. In the seventh month of 1377, this office was expanded and upgraded under the new name of Office of Transmission (*T'ung-cheng ssu*). The emperor had announced the previous month that anyone could submit a memorial to the throne, commoner and official alike, so long as it concerned affairs of importance, and that he would personally read it. (In fact, commoners could – and did¹¹⁴ – memorialize the throne only to impeach the local magistrate.) The Office of Transmission may have been enlarged in the expectation that this edict would elicit an enlarged flow of communications to the throne. When the Office of Transmission received a memorial, duplicates were made and the original sent on to the emperor. The copies were transmitted to the Office of Supervising Secretaries. The emperor read the document, attached his rescript in response, then sent both memorial and rescript to the Office of Supervising Secretaries to route to the appropriate department for action. The Office of Transmission was thus in a critical position in the chain of communication between the emperor and his subjects. Failure by that office to report to the throne any document it received was regarded as a serious offense. As the Yung-lo emperor thundered on one occasion when he discovered that a few memorials on minor matters had not reached him, “Stability depends on superior and inferior communicating; there is none when they do not. From ancient times, many a state has fallen because a ruler does not know the affairs of the people.”¹¹⁵

Officials within the capital could submit their memorials by a different route. They were permitted to send them directly to the palace eunuch office at the Gate of Polar Convergence (*Hui-t'ung men*) without having to go through the Office of Transmission. The advantage was complete confidentiality. As Ray Huang has pointed out, direct submission to the palace meant that the contents of these memorials remained confidential until the emperor sent them out, with his decision attached, to the Office of Supervising Secretaries. “The personal petitions and their contents remained confidential, unknown even to the writers’ superiors. Many a controversy was caused by papers in the latter category,” as opposed to documents that reached the emperor through the more permeable Office of Transmission.¹¹⁶

After a memorial had been seen by the emperor, it and his rescript were edited into a court record (*ch'ao-pao*). From this, a summary was prepared for

114 E.g., *MS*, pp. 7189, 7191, 7193, 7213.

115 Quoted in Yin Yün-kung, *Chung-kuo Ming-tai hsin-wen ch'uan-po shih* (Ch'ung-ch'ing, 1990), p. 28.

116 Ray Huang, *1587, a year of no significance: The Ming dynasty in decline* (New Haven, 1981), p. 15.

printing in the *Peking Gazette* (*ti-pao*). This publication circulated knowledge of court affairs to officials throughout the administration. Memorials and edicts constituted the largest part of the *Peking Gazette*, but the *Gazette* also reported on a range of topics relative to state affairs: the activities of the emperor, promotions and demotions, military affairs, foreign relations, and natural disasters – which, though briefly reported, had potentially the greatest impact in a culture in which imbalances in nature were read as judgments on imperial conduct.¹¹⁷

The Ming state had to handle other sorts of documents besides communications between the emperor and his officials. Requirements regarding the central filing of fiscal information probably generated the largest volume of paper records that had to move between the field administration and the capital. When the Hung-wu emperor in 1391 ordered local officials to ensure that all the households in their counties were properly registered in the *li-chia* system, he issued them with a model registration form and instructed them to “have it copied and cut onto a printing block.” After filling in a sample form on the basis of a local household to ensure that it accorded with local conditions, the county magistrate was then to print up the forms and distribute them to village-level officers in every ward of the county. Once completed, the forms were to be returned to the magistrate, who then bound them together into booklets known as Yellow Registers (*huang-ts’e*). Census laws required that copies of these tax books be forwarded once a decade to the Ministry of Revenue in Nanking, where they were checked and then transferred for storage to the specially constructed storehouse at Back Lake (Hou hu). The volume of text storage that this system required was enormous. The Ministry gazetteer of 1550 records that the Ministry received 53,393 volumes “at the beginning of the Ming,” referring presumably to the 1390s.¹¹⁸

The transmission of private documents

Like the two types of state documents (communications and records), two categories of private documents circulated in the Ming: those designed to transmit information, like letters; and those designed to preserve it, like contracts.

117 Although no copies of the gazette have survived, an anonymous compiler of the late Ming preserved extracts from the gazette between 1573 and 1617; see *Wan-li ti-ch’ao* (compiled late Wan-li era, Taipei, 1963). The *Peking Gazette* in the Ming has been studied by Yin Yün-kung, *Chung-kuo Ming-tai hsin-wen ch’uan-po shih* (Ch’ung-ch’ing, 1990).

118 *Nanking hu-pu chih* (1550), 5, p. 15b.

Letters were widely sent and received, as one may judge from the frequency of references to sending and receiving them in Ming writings. In general, letters were neither casual nor private documents, and frequently were preserved as examples of fine writing in the literary collections of writers, particularly in the late Ming. Like any text, the letter followed conventions of structure and style. Those of lesser literacy who wished to write elegant letters, but did not have the training for that task were able, in the late Yüan and Ming, to make use of letter-writing guides, which were published either as self-standing volumes, such as the early-Ming *Han-mo ch'üan-shu* (*Complete book of pen and ink*), or as sections of general reference works, such as the late-Yüan *Ch'i-cha ch'ing-ch'ien* (*forms of correspondence as good as ready cash*). Both guides were pirated, rewritten, and produced in large numbers during the Ming. Their popularity attests to the circulation of letters among a growing literate population, and to a greater textuality of social intercourse that literacy made possible: the realm of private reading and writing was enlarging through the Ming.

Once written, letters had to be sent. No public institution existed to deliver them. The courier and postal services were solely for the transmission of state communications. Couriers were forbidden to carry private documents, though, of course, they did for a fee, and, in doing so meant that the state was indirectly facilitating private correspondence. Lo Hung-hsien's 1539 travel essay, referred to in the preceding section, makes several references to the sending of private letters. Lo begins the essay by saying that, when he reached Chen-chiang, he found a letter from the philosopher Wang Chi (1498–1583) waiting for him at the courier station. Wang was up-river in Nanking at the time serving in the Ministry of War. As Lo and Wang had first met seven years earlier, it is possible that Lo had written Wang a letter from home two and a half months earlier, before he set out, to let Wang know he would be passing by the southern capital on his way to Peking; it is also possible that Wang heard about Lo's impending appointment and took it upon himself to intercept Lo by letter en route. Wang's position would have allowed him to have the courier system handle the letter. After receiving Wang's letter, Lo proceeded up-river to the courier station at Lung-t'an, 50 kilometers from Nanking, and sent his own letter the next morning, this time with a messenger. Hand-delivering letters would have been feasible at this distance. As it happens, Wang did the same, but the weather was foul and the messengers missed each other. The next morning, Wang dealt with the communication breakdown by going personally out to Lung-t'an to accompany Lo into Nanking. (Later, while he was in Yangchow, Lo received a letter from a friend living in Ch'üan-chiao, which lay a journey of some 160 kilometers west. Unfortunately, Lo does not say how

the letter was delivered, only that the missive "arrived, inviting me to go to see him."¹¹⁹

Letters traveling short distances could be sent via servants, but those going longer distances had to be handed to friends, or more likely itinerant merchants, going in the direction of their destination. Hsü Hung-tsu makes many references to long-distance letters in his travel diaries. At the start of his long trip to Yunnan, he visited his friend Ch'en Chi-ju (1558–1639) in Soochow on 22 October 1636. Seizing this rare opportunity to correspond with two monks of his acquaintance on Chi-tsu Mountain in Yunnan, Ch'en wrote a letter and asked Hsü to deliver it to them, which he did. While on his travels, Hsü also dispatched his own letters to friends and relatives back east. While stuck at the western edge of Kweichow looking for a porter to take him into Yunnan, he learned that a Hu-kuang merchant was about to go back to his home province. Hsü gave him a letter addressed to his uncle. Presumably, the merchant was expected to get it as far as the Yangtze River, where he would then entrust it to someone else who would take it downriver to Chiang-nan.¹²⁰

Despite the hit-or-miss quality of delivery, it appears that people in the Ming were confident that their letters would reach their destinations. One gets this impression from editors' notes in commercial collections of poetry and letters published in Chiang-nan in the early Ch'ing. For instance, a collection of model letters published in Hangchow in 1663 includes a notice asking readers to mail interesting letters to the publisher for inclusion in sequels, which duly appeared in 1667 and 1668. Whether any of the letters in the sequels reached the publisher in response to this advertisement, we do not know. Some of the letters themselves offer further evidence of private mail. In the second sequel, a woman painter writes to a woman editor suggesting that a group of like-minded women poets could be formed, without actually meeting in person, by mailing poems to each other on the spring and fall holidays; she also wonders whether their poems might be sent to the editor to produce an anthology of their poetry.¹²¹

The other type of private written document that was important to the conduct of Ming life was the contract. Just as the government relied on texts such as Yellow Registers to keep track of land ownership and tax assessments, so too the people kept their own written records relating to

119 Lo Hung-hsien, *Nien-an wen-chi*, 5, pp. 1b–3b.

120 Hsü Hung-tsu, *Hsü Hsia-k'o-yu-chi*, pp. 94, 675.

121 *Cb'ib-tu hsün-yü kuang-pien* (Model letters, further (third) collection), quoted in Ellen Widmer, "The epistolary world of female talent in seventeenth-century China," *Late Imperial China*, 10, No. 2 (December 1989), p. 9. I am indebted to Dorothy Ko for drawing my attention to the mailing of letters by women.

the buying, selling, and mortgaging of property. Such a contract specified the size and location of the property under transaction, its price, and the conditions and consequences attached to the sale. It bore the names of buyer and vendor, as well as several witnesses plus the scribe responsible for writing out the document. Each party signed or affixed his seal under his name to verify that the document corresponded to the transaction. An illiterate simply drew a cross. The land contract was not invented in the Ming dynasty, but it survives in considerable volume only from that period.

The place for which the largest number of contracts has survived is Hui-chou prefecture, as famous for the servitude of its agricultural laborers as it was for the wealth of its merchants. Chinese researchers to date have collected 685 land contracts from the Ming, spanning the years 1400 to 1643. By contrast, only two Sung and ten Yüan contracts have survived. Contract survival after 1400 does not indicate that land contracts before 1400 were not universal as a means of preserving and communicating economic transactions starting in the early Ming. Yet one can speculate that the preservation of economic transactions in written form was becoming more the norm than previously.

The earliest surviving Ming contract from Hui-chou, dated 1400, records the sale of 0.848 *mu* of land in Hsiu-ning county.¹²² It is signed by the vendor, his aunt, his uncle, a witness, and a scribe by the name of Wu Chih-kao. Wu declares that he has written the contract down on the basis of oral testimony. This scribe has left no other written record. His name does not happen to appear on the few other Hsiu-ning contracts preserved from this time, nor was he the author of any other sort of text. Though able to write, Wu was working from a formula, manipulating the set phrases of which this and all other land contracts are composed. His was not entirely a mechanical literacy, however, for he had to be capable of inserting information specific to the particular transaction and of altering the formulae to incorporate such details. Wu Chih-kao would not have been the lone scribe in Hsiu-ning county. Far from it. Hsiu-ning, like every county, must have had dozens of such men to meet the demand for written records. Wu was thus one of many tens of thousands of literate professionals in the early Ming who played an essential role in facilitating the textuality of economic life, and who are known only through the chance survival of the flimsy documents they scripted.

122 *Ming-Ch'ing Hui-chou she-hui ching-chi tzu-liao ts'ung-pien*, ed. Chung-kuo she-hui k'o-hsüeh-yüan, Li-shih yen-chiu-so, Hui-chou wen-ch'i cheng-li-tsu (Peking, 1990), Vol. 2, p. 19.

Public recitation

Although the Ming state understood the importance of documents, it was aware of the need to translate written and printed texts into oral form in order to communicate to the people at large. To facilitate mass communication, the Hung-wu emperor called for two public pavilions to be built adjacent to the yamen in every prefecture and county in the country. An additional pair might also be built at centers outside the county seat, such as market towns. The Pavilion for Revering Goodness (*Ching-shan t'ing*) was a place for broadcasting the good deeds of local people who had displayed exemplary moral conduct by posting their names on lists. At the Pavilion for Extending Illumination (*Shen-ming t'ing*), the names and misdeeds of criminals were announced as a warning to others. The latter was also a forum for resolving disputes, particularly between households wrangling over marriage issues.¹²³ This forum for communicating right values could be conducted by the magistrate, or put in the charge of local elders.¹²⁴

The ceremonies mandated for the two pavilions were not kept up, nor were the pavilions themselves. Some late-Ming magistrates took it upon themselves to rebuild the pavilions in an attempt to re-animate the founder's vision of a precommercial moral order. The Pavilion for Extending Illumination in Kwangtung's Ting-an county, for instance, was rebuilt in 1578 and relocated in 1582, yet, in the prefectural gazetteer thirty-five years later, it is recorded as derelict.¹²⁵ A lack of the necessary persuasive or coercive measures that would oblige attendance at the pavilions undercut the state's ability to sustain the oral communication of moral values through this forum.

Local officials could address their subjects outside this framework by giving public lectures, addressed usually to the local elite. A county magistrate in Yangchow, for instance, constructed what he called the *Ch'in-min Kuan* or Hall for Loving the People in 1530 "for the convenience of lecturing and learning."¹²⁶ There is, unfortunately, no indication of whom the magistrate was targeting for instruction, although possibly they may have been the county students. Other magistrates used public address to communicate with the local elite as a whole as the need arose. When the magistrate of Ch'ung-shan county, Kwangtung, wished to see community schools revived in 1532, he "gathered the gentry of Ch'ung-shan at the Temple to Confucius

123 The resolution of marriage disputes at a *Shen-ming t'ing* is mentioned in P'an Shen, *Ho-chien fu-chih* (1540), 4, p. 5b.

124 Regarding local elders using *Shen-ming t'ing*, see Pao Ying, *Ku-shih hsien-chih* (1659), 3, p. 6a; regarding pavilions at markets, see 3, p. 14b.

125 *Ch'ung-shan fu-chih* (1619), 4, p. 30b.

126 Ch'eng Meng-hsing, *Yang-chow fu-chih* (1733), 13, p. 12b.

and addressed them” on the subject. It served as an opportunity both to win their general support for the project and to honor by name those who agreed to undertake the work.¹²⁷

A conscientious *chü-jen* who served as magistrate of Ku-shih county, Honan, from 1459 to 1465 chose to reach the people, rather than just the gentry, through a “Song to encourage agriculture” (*Ch’üan nung ko*) of his own composing:

I urge you to revere filiality,
I urge you to be in harmony in your villages,
I urge you to be diligent in agriculture and sericulture,
I urge you to be at peace whether you go or whether you stay

The song’s goal was to reaffirm the social order and everyone’s place in it:

Let the poor scholar have his books;
Let the peasant have his land;
Let the artisan and merchant follow their different callings;
Then when I see you in no matter what place,
Each will be devoted to his own calling,
Without animosity or envy,
Whether you go or whether you stay.¹²⁸

The 1659 county gazetteer in which this song appears does not indicate how the text was made available to the people. We know, however, that it was received, for an editor commented two centuries later that “even today the common people sing it.”¹²⁹ Was the author himself able to recite it in a dialect that would have been locally understood? It may not have been enormously difficult for him to command the local dialect, as he was a native of Ho-chou in Nan Chihli, the province directly east of Honan. In Ku-shih he worked energetically among the people, promoting major public works projects such as irrigation, schools, and bridges. This activism would have been difficult to sustain had he been unable to communicate effectively with local gentry and peasants alike.

Dialect in the Ming was an uncompromising marker of many boundaries: within and between regions, between classes, and between urban and rural. The editor of the 1619 gazetteer of Hai-nan Island notes all three of the distinctions dialect could mark when he observes that “there is the official dialect and the correct dialect of the central region [meaning north China]: the gentry as well as urban residents can speak approximations of these, whereas no

127 Li Hsi and Ts’ai Fan, *Ch’üan-shan hsien-chih* (1917), 15, p. 18b, from a stele by Huo T’ao (1487–1540), at home in Kwangtung at the time mourning his mother.

128 Pao Ying, *Ku-shih hsien-chih* (1659), 10, p. 31a–b.

129 Pao Ying, *Ku-shih hsien-chih* (1659), 5, p. 37a.

one in the rural villages knows them.” In other words, the Hainanese elite and the people of the towns mastered a local version of Mandarin, and used this to distinguish their speech from those who were rural and lower class. But presumably the better educated felt the gap between their version and that spoken in north China as reflective of a social barrier that was difficult for them to cross. By speaking in the voice of another region, they not only shared in the hegemonic project of correct speech emanating from the court, but could also seek to overcome their own native sense as southerners excluded from that hegemony. The editor goes on to note another dialect, the “eastern dialect.” This, he says, is close to Fukien dialect, which presumably reflects the movement of Fukienese down the coast. Beyond these there is also the language of the Li minority in the region, which again subdivides according to different spatial histories: the dialect considered native to the Li of Hai-nan, and the West River dialect which apparently is a form of Li spoken in Kwangsi province. As for the local patois that everyone spoke, even that had its hierarchy, for the editor observes that “the speech of the prefectural capital is regarded as standard, and it has gradually colored [the dialect of] all the villages.”¹³⁰ Hai-nan dialect thus varied along the status gradient between town and country that was ubiquitous through Ming China. Interestingly, the editor ends his short essay on dialect by expressing concern about the constant – and from his point of view, corrosive – influence of Li on local speech. If the gentry wanted to keep the boundary between the elite and the common distinct, they were even more committed to maintaining that the difference between Han and non-Han marked a crucial social boundary that must be preserved. Aboriginal language had no place in public (Chinese) discourse.

Publicly posted texts

State and populace alike accepted the authority of written communications and used them whenever possible to promote ideas in their interests. People scrawled graffiti on walls and posted leaflets or placards in conspicuous places to communicate their views to the public at large as well as to the state’s local representatives. These proclamations did not entirely rely on literacy to be effective. The relationship that most people had to these public texts could not have been a readerly one, since most were illiterate. As long as one person could read the text and relay its subject matter to others, the text was effective. Also, the simple act of posting a text was also at least as much

¹³⁰ *Ch’ing-chou fu-chih* (1619), 3, pp. 83b–84a.

a matter of communicating authority (or a challenge to authority) as it was a matter of communicating specific information.

The story of Chou Te-ch'eng (1339–91), a magistrate of Hsiu-ning county, Hui-chou, is an early-Ming example of the placard at work. Chou was arrested in his seventh year in office because of accusations made in anonymous placards posted at the gate of the local yamen. He was saved from condemnation when thirty members of the county elite organized support for him and traveled to Nanking to intercede at court on his behalf.¹³¹ The people of Hsiu-ning were divided in their opinions regarding the policies or methods of Magistrate Chou. Those who opposed him did not dominate public opinion among the elite and therefore had to resort to anonymous placards to defame the man. In this case, the placard expressed views excluded from official or elite channels of communication.

On his side, a local magistrate was an originator of texts for public display, some of his own composition, some transmitted through him from his superiors. Such proclamations were essential to his work. He needed to communicate all manner of information: calendars and ritual days, the dates and methods of tax collections, rules for markets, new government regulations, and so forth. His repertoire of proclamations extended beyond these practical concerns, however, and might also include moral lectures and warnings. Texts were not just for conveying information to the people, after all, but for projecting an appropriate image of magisterial rule. To maintain the security of the area under his jurisdiction and to ensure a steady flow of tax revenue, the magistrate found it useful to assure his people that the good order of society relied equally on his and their moral conduct. Texts of declaration, exhortation, and praise helped to carry out this task. For those who moved in such channels, the preferred way of expressing views was to post a text by transcribing it onto a stone stele. Like the placard, such monumental texts communicated at only one location, but they had the added advantage of communicating over time. If the elite sometimes lost control of the present when contrary placards spoke up against them, they could always assert their control over future opinion by posting their views in stone. These epigraphic records were used to impart many types of information prejudicial to the many contests for local resources that colored local political life. They textualized the social landscape: identifying important sites on the local landscape, thereby indicating to local people which locations and institutions were of particular cultural value. They provided posthumous biographies of eminent local people in order to honor their contributions to local society – as well as see that their contributions not be erased from public

131 Zurndorfer, *Change and continuity in Chinese local history*, pp. 89–90.

memory, thus enabling their descendants to bask in their ancestors' authority. They recorded the construction or repair of local buildings, thus recognizing the investments of those who paid for the work and the symbolic capital they had thereby earned. They registered the fiduciary property of public institutions (sometimes including not only lists of plots of land but simple maps as well) to protect such land from unlawful expropriation. Steles could also be used to admonish or warn the local people about immoral or illegal activities in which they were habitually engaged. Such admonitions were almost always the work of the local magistrate.

Printing

Communications recited in pavilions, pasted on yamen walls, or cut into stone were limited to those within eyesight. However successfully the information they bore moved among the people, recitations and written texts were hampered by physical immobility. Only after being transcribed and printed could these instances of communication circulate – as they did, in great and growing volumes through the Ming. The availability of printing was a significant communicative resource, for the state, to be sure, but also for the people. By the last century of the Ming, it was printing, not official fiat, that was determining which ideas entered public discourse and how they circulated.

Most printing in the Ming was xylographic: that is, texts were carved onto woodblocks and impressions taken by laying paper over their inked surfaces. Xylography had been in use for many centuries and was a common and relatively simple technology. Some Ming printers would use movable type, a technology that Chinese printers had developed as early as the eleventh century, but it was never widely used.¹³² Although the initial cost of cutting the text of a book onto woodblocks was greater than aligning movable type, xylography was regarded as the better long-term investment because the book, once its blocks were cut, could be almost endlessly reprinted, whereas a book in movable type would have to be set all over again once the type had been put to other uses. Additionally, the woodblock carver, unlike the typesetter, did not need to be literate. He had simply to carve around characters that a scribe had brushed (in reverse) onto the block. Only the cost of storage detracted from the popularity of woodblocks, and that does not appear to have been a concern in the Ming.

¹³² This and other aspects of printing in the Ming are outlined in K. T. Wu, "Ming printing and printers," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 7, No. 3 (1943), pp. 203–60. See also Ts'ien Tsuen-hsuin, *Paper and printing*, Vol. 5, part 1 of *Science and Civilization in China*, ed. Joseph Needham (Cambridge 1985), pp. 172–83, 211–15, 262–69.

Being a relatively simple and inexpensive technology, xylographic printing was widely used in Ming society to duplicate written records in the hope of preserving them. We see this, for example, in the regulations of a Kwangtung lineage, which advise members that “maps of the family graves should be printed,” not just preserved in manuscript copies.¹³³ Printing was advised to forestall lineage members in subsequent generations from launching property claims against graves on the basis of records that varied from those held by the lineage elders, since all the copies of the printed maps would be the same.

The Ming made much use of printing’s capacity to duplicate information. For example, the Ministry of Works used this technology prior to every decennial census to circulate models of the registration forms that local officials were to use when compiling the Yellow Registers.¹³⁴ It also printed the licenses or vouchers (*yin*) used in the state salt and tea monopolies. These licenses were printed at state workshops in Nanking from iron plates rather than woodblocks, since wood could not have withstood the scale of production needed to supply enough licenses; the tea monopoly required over 150,000 a year. The labor to produce the salt licenses was obtained by compelling fifty-four artisan households from Soochow and Hangchow to move to Nanking and work within the precincts of the palace. Presumably they were skilled printers, possibly also metalworkers. In 1421, the printing plates and the artisans were dispatched to Peking to continue operations there, but six years later both were transferred back to Nanking, which remained the center for printing salt and tea licenses to the end of the dynasty. The printers worked in two shifts, one shift printing the licenses and the other numbering them and imprinting them with official seals. The cost of the paper needed to print tea licenses and to make up the receipt books (*ti-pu*) against which licenses were stamped when they were issued had to be covered by the budgets of the counties in which were located the inspection stations for the tea monopoly. Paid for locally, the paper was then shipped to Nanking where the actual licenses were printed within state workshops.¹³⁵

An indication of both the ubiquity and skill of printers in the early Ming is the reported success with which counterfeiters were able to reproduce items that the state had printed, notably the paper currency that the Hung-wu administration issued. Counterfeit bills were printed in large numbers, and it was said that only the most perceptive were able to distinguish true from

133 Quoted in Taga Akigorō, *Sōfuno kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1960), p. 608, trans. in *Chinese civilization and society: a sourcebook*, ed. Patricia Ebrey (New York, 1981), p. 166.

134 Wei Ch’ing-yüan, *Ming-tai huang-ts’u chih-tu* (Peking, 1961), p. 23.

135 Hsieh Pin, *Nan-ching hu-pu chih* (1550), 12, p. 40a, 14, pp. 36a, 38b. As of 1550, twenty-one of these households continued to produce salt licenses.

fake. Chu Piao (1355–92), Hung-wu's heir apparent, who was appointed to oversee the issuance of paper currency, was said to be particularly adept at detecting counterfeit bills.¹³⁶ The same problem plagued the tea monopoly, since its licenses were as good as money. On each license was printed a warning of dire consequence and handsome reward on the license: "Those who produce counterfeit tea licenses will be executed and their property confiscated, and those who report on and apprehend them will be awarded twenty taels."¹³⁷

Printing was a technology that a local official of the Ming was also expected to use for duplicating forms. The regulations governing the registration of households and land required him to have the necessary registration forms locally printed, the cost of the paper for making the forms being treated as part of the levy on the *li-chia* officers.¹³⁸ Once the printed forms were filled in, they were bound into registers (Yellow Register for household census data, Fish-scale Register for land data) and filed in Nanking. These two sets of registers placed a considerable transcription burden on the county, for such written records required a literate staff. A Kwangtung gazetteer indicates that, to produce a Yellow Register for his county, a magistrate had to appoint secretaries (*li-shu*) at the township level, plus a general secretary (*tsung-shu*) at the county level to transcribe, collate, and summarize the data. At the village level, each community had to select one among them who was both numerate and literate to act as scribe (*shu-nung*).¹³⁹ It seems that a magistrate in the early Ming could expect to corvée a sufficient number of people who had the literacy needed to produce the Yellow Registers. For the magistrate, the work of collecting household and land information, sequencing it in retrievable order, and transcribing it onto master lists required not just literacy, but various other technologies such as printing, binding, and book storage. He had to hire printers and binders, and maintain or build a county archive to store all this paper.

State publishing

The Hung-wu emperor was well aware that he lived in a print culture and understood the ease with which ideas circulated in society. Rather than trying to monopolize publishing, or license publishers, as states in Reformation Eur-

136 Chu Yün-ming, *Yeh chi*, p. 102.

137 Hsieh Pin, *Nanching hu-pu chib* (1550), 12, p. 392.

138 MHT, 20, p. 1b.

139 Ts'ai Kuang-ch'ien, et al., *Ch'ung-chow fu-chib* (1619), 5, p. 662.

ope did as they confronted a new technology,¹⁴⁰ the emperor chose to exploit printing as a means of seeing that ideas he favored circulated more effectively than any one else's. The books Hung-wu had published may be roughly grouped into five categories.

First were the scholarly texts of the Confucian tradition, which students in government schools were required to memorize. The emperor deemed the correct text of the *Book of changes* to be Ch'eng I's version with Chu Hsi's commentaries; he declared the correct version of the *Book of poetry* to be Chu Hsi's edition; and so forth. Which recension of a classic he (or, more accurately, his advisors) denominated as the correct version may have had less to do with the positioning of that text within academic debates on the textual history of the classic question than with the need for fixing on one – any one – among others. The publishing of official editions enabled the emperor to establish a canon of knowledge deemed to underpin his vision of social order. It also cut down on the instability of the content of texts handed down over centuries and subject to corruption, for every copy that every student throughout China used said exactly the same thing, and would always say exactly the same thing. Differences among texts could then not be mobilized to dispute the authority of the state.

The second category of Hung-wu publications were the many handbooks of judicial, administrative, and ritual laws of the dynasty that the regime published to inform officials of the terms within which they were to administer the realm. The first to be issued was the *Ta Ming ling* (*Ming statutes*), which according to Chinese precedent appeared in the first year of the dynasty. This was soon followed by the *Ta Ming chi-li* (*Collected rites of the Ming dynasty*), and the *Hsien-kang shih-lei* (*Regulations for the censorial system*) of 1371. The most important legal text produced under the Hung-wu emperor, the *Ta Ming lü* (*The Ming code*), was first published in 1373–74, then revised in a new standard edition in 1397. A separate compilation of laws governing the military, the *Chün-fa ting-lü* (*fixed code of military laws*), probably also originated in this decade. Many others followed: the *Chu-ssu chih-chang* (*Handbook of government posts*), compiled by imperial order and produced in 1393; the *Chi-ku ting-chih* (*fixed regulations based on ancient models*) of 1396, which dictated the ritual prescriptions for ennobled officials, to mention only two.

A third category of publications emanating from Hung-wu's court were moralistic texts: among these were his own personal instructions issued to guide social, rather than just administrative, conduct. In the winter of 1380, in the wake of the Hu Wei-yung affair, he ordered his court scholars to go

140 Timothy Brook, "Censorship in eighteenth-century China: a view from the book trade," *Canadian Journal of History*, 23, No. 29 (1988), pp. 179–80.

through all the historical texts from the *Ch'un ch'iu* (*Spring and autumn annals*) forward and select exemplary and abominable ministers. He had their biographies edited and printed up in two separate volumes, with his own prefaces, for wide distribution.¹⁴¹ Of his personal instructions, the first was his *Tzu-chih t'ung-hsün* (*General instructions on government*) of 1375. This was followed by his three, increasingly censorious *Ta kao* (*Great admonitions*) printed and distributed in 1385 and 1386, and his *Chiao-min pang-wen* (*proclamation to the people*) published in 1398. These instructions were intended to function orally: for recitation to the common people and memorization by all students at government schools (a convicted criminal who could recite the *Great admonitions* from memory could get his sentence reduced by one degree). But they also functioned as texts: every household was required to possess a copy even if it had no literate members, not so that it could be read, therefore, but simply possessed as a demonstration of loyalty to the dynasty. The more specialized *Huang Ming tsu-hsün* (*The ancestral instructions of the Ming dynasty*), first issued in 1373 and published in its final edition in 1395, gave his instructions regarding the privileges and norms affecting imperial princes.

Fourthly, Hung-wu issued texts to the elite to control their forms of communication. The *Hung-wu cheng-yün* (*Correct rhymes of the Hung-wu era*), which the emperor ordered Sung Lien to edit in 1379, determined the rhymes that were suitable for poetry. As poetry was a type of official discourse, fixing rhymes served to establish conventions governing the composition of texts, and hence of determining which forms of public communication were acceptable and which were not.

A final category of Hung-wu texts is official monographs produced to lend authority to the founder's institutions. A book that typifies this category is *Hung-wu ching-ch'eng t'u-chih* (*Illustrated gazetteer of the Hung-wu capital*), printed by imperial order at the Ministry of Works in 1395. This bare-bones gazetteer of the city of Nanking was produced, according to the assistant supervisor of imperial instruction who wrote the preface, to align Nanking within the tradition of the great capitals throughout Chinese history, not as the capital of another short-term regional dynasty (as Nanking had been in the past), but as the central place of the realm on which "all lines of communication converge" and to which all subjects submitted. The gazetteer was needed, the instructor declared, to ensure that the plan of the city did not suffer the fate of the plans of earlier dynastic capitals and be lost. The preface communicates Hung-wu's anxiety about the permanence of his capital; well-placed, as it

141 The prefaces are reprinted in Chu Yüan-chang, *Ming t'ai-tsu chi* (Ho-fei, 1991), pp. 310–12.

turned out, for as soon as the Yung-lo emperor was enthroned, he decided to move the capital to Peking.¹⁴²

Hung-wu's enthusiasm for publishing continued with his descendants on the throne. Yung-lo had the Confucian classics re-edited and fixed as three sets of matching texts known as the *Wu-ching ta-ch'üan* (*Compendium of the Five Classics*), the *Ssu-shu ta-ch'üan* (*Compendium of the Four Books*), and the *Hsing-li ta-ch'üan* (*Compendium on nature and principle*), which anthologized major post-classical writings such as Chu Hsi's *Chia li* (*family rituals*). These imperial recensions became the basic texts that students in the examination system had to master in order to move into state service. Not only the Confucian classics, but the Taoist and Buddhist canons as well, were ordered re-edited and published under the authority of the Yung-lo emperor. The Ming *Tao tsang* (*Taoist canon*) was commissioned in 1406, though not published until 1445. The so-called Northern edition of the Buddhist Tripitaka was initiated later, in 1420, but completed earlier, in 1440. In addition to these grander projects, the Yung-lo emperor also sponsored the production of several simple didactic texts, notably the *Ch'üan-shan shu* (*Exhortation to goodness*) issued under his wife's name shortly after her death in 1407, the *Wei-shan yin-chih* (*The blessings of doing good secretly*) of 1419, and the *Hsiao-shun shih-shih* (*Testimonies to filiality and obedience*) of 1420. These were modest works when compared with the massive didactic work credited to his successor, the Hsüan-te emperor, the 62-*chüan* *Wu-lun shu* (*On the five relationships*). This book was not printed by the palace until 1443, eight years after Hsüan-te's death.

The editorial project for which the Yung-lo emperor's sponsorship is best remembered, and to which he attached his own reign title, is the *Yung-lo ta-tien*, or *Yung-lo Encyclopedia*. This massive work in 22,887 *chüan* was the outcome of an edict issued in the first year of his reign (1403) to preserve existing knowledge. A first draft was done under the direction of Hsieh Chin (1369–1415) and submitted to the throne at the end of 1404, but was found inadequate. Yung-lo ordered the project expanded, and a fuller compilation completed in 1408. The project was made possible in part by his father's book-collecting. Hung-wu had not been a bibliophile, but he had understood the power of written knowledge and aspired to bring it within his control by amassing a large palace library. One of Hung-wu's personae was of the reader who from time to time went through the great stacks of books in his collec-

¹⁴² There is no record of how many copies were printed. By 1492, when it was republished, the book was a rarity. Perhaps the displacement of the primary capital to Peking had deflated interest in Nanking's imperial history to such an extent that no-one cared about the book. The magistrate who sponsored republication in 1492 insisted that all bibliophiles would want a copy, but this edition also failed to re-establish the text. It was only the rediscovery and reprinting of the gazetteer under Kuei Yu-kuang's sponsorship in the 1360s that enabled it to survive to the twentieth century.

tion.¹⁴³ The basis of his library was the books from the Yüan imperial library, which were saved when the Ming forces took Peking, and transferred to Nanking. Thereafter Hung-wu decreed that copies of all surviving books throughout the realm be sent to the palace. It seems that Hung-wu's book-collecting project was not actively pursued, for when Yung-lo in 1406 inquired about the holdings of the imperial library from Hsieh Chin, whose work as director of the *Encyclopedia* would have made him well familiar with the collection, Hsieh told him that much was incomplete and missing. The emperor responded by dispatching agents to buy books, with the order that they pay the owners whatever prices they were asking. Presumably he was anxious lest the editors of the second compilation not have everything they needed to complete their task.¹⁴⁴ From the fragments that have survived, it appears that the editors of the *Encyclopedia* worked from a rich collection of sources. Brief editorial references in the chapters on the Peking region in the geographical section, for instance, note that they were compiled by pulling information out of what the editors cite generically as *i' u-ching chih-shu*, "gazetteers and records,"¹⁴⁵ of the Hung-wu era. As there were almost no published gazetteers for this part of the country this early in the dynasty, though many more were compiled, the editors must have had access to local manuscript histories as well as to administrative documents to compile the section.

The *Yung-lo Encyclopedia* was never published, but all the other imperial compilations mentioned so far were. Desirous not just of fixing the canon, but communicating it, the Ming emperors operated a Classics Workshop (*ching-ch'ang*) within the palace. Books printed here, known as "official books" (*kuan-shu*) or "imperially produced books" (*yü-chih-shu*), were required reading for officials and the basis of the curriculum in the state schools. The shorter texts may have been distributed to schools free of charge as part of the emperor's campaign to impose a universal standard of belief and conduct throughout his realm, but the larger compendia had to be purchased out of the budgets of local magistrates or educational officials. For instance, the five-*chüan* *Blessings of doing good secretly* and the two-*chüan* *Testimonies to filiality and obedience* were "presented" to the state school in Tz'u-li county, Hu-kuang, in 1420, the year they were first made available for distribution. The school may have received them automatically, or it may have acquired them

143 This persona is invoked, for example, in several of his prefaces; see, e.g., Chu Yüan-chang, *Ming't'ai-shu chi*, ed. Hu Shih-o (Ho-fei, 1991), pp. 296, 302.

144 *MS*, p. 2343.

145 See, for example, Miao Ch'an-sun, ed., *Shun-t'ien fu-chih* (1886; rpt. Peking, 1983), pp. 1, 257. The term *i' u-ching* (literally, "illustrated classic") was used in the Sui and Tang for prototypes of the local gazetteer; *chih-shu* is a less categorical term for administrative documents having the force of law. The only gazetteer for which I have found them used together is the 1522 gazetteer of Hu-kuang province, entitled *Hu-kuang i' u-ching chih-shu*.

through the generosity of the local or a local donor. The Hsüan-te emperor's far bulkier *On the five relationships* was not presented to the school until 1447, four years after it was published.¹⁴⁶ The delay in acquisition could indicate that time was needed to allocate budget money to purchase the work. With few exceptions, the catalogues of books in the possession of county schools (which can be found in some gazetteers) list almost every one of the imperially produced books just mentioned, with the exception of the military code.¹⁴⁷

Among the books published under later emperors, two volumes produced by order of the youthful Chia-ching emperor (r. 1522–66) stand out. Rather than relay his unpopular judgments on two contentious matters through the *Peking Gazette*, Chia-ching decided to have his views expressed through the publication of two document collections favoring his position. The first, *Ming-lun ta-tien* (*Great canon on illuminating human relationships*), was printed in 1525 in the wake of the Great Rites Controversy of 1524 to justify his unpopular gesture of bestowing imperial honours on his father, who had not reigned as emperor. First published under the title *Ta-li chi-i* (*Collected deliberations on the great rites* [controversy]), the text was re-edited and expanded as the *Great canon* in a palace edition of 1528 and widely circulated. The Chia-ch'ing emperor followed the same course of putting his interpretation of events into print in the wake of the Great Imprisonment Controversy of 1526. He ordered a similar compilation of texts, *Ch'in-ming ta-yü lu* (*Imperial record of the great imprisonment* [controversy]), published to justify his judgment regarding an escaped rebel.

Magisterial publishing

Ming magistrates, like their emperors, also became involved in publishing texts as a means of extending their influence over the moral and social lives of the people in their charge. For example, when Huang Ju-chin (cs. 1505) took office as the education intendant of Nan Chihli in 1509, he was distressed to find that “the literary fashion favored the frivolous and the extravagant” in this region of high literary production. Huang perceived – as indeed he should have, given his Confucian training – that deviation from classical style threatened to pervert not simply the forms in which individuals wrote, but the principal mode of communication that identified the gentry as elevated servants of the state. Confucianism was embodied in set texts, and its

¹⁴⁶ Ch'en Kuang-ch'ien, *Tz'u-li hsien-chib* (1574), 11, p. 14b.

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Cheng Ch'ing-yün and Hsin Shao-tso, *Yen-p'ingfu-chib* (1526), 12, pp. 7a–8a; Chang Yüeh, *Hui-an hsien-chib* (1530), 9, p. 10a–b; *Jui-chin hsien-chib* (1542), 3, pp. 13a–14a; Hsieh Ku, *Jui-ch'ang hsien-chib* (1568), 5, pp. 6a–7a. The only citation of *Chün-fa ting-lü* that I have encountered is in Hsieh Pin, *Nanching hu-pu chib* (1550), *yin-yung shu-mu*, p. 1a.

adherents were trained by being taught to produce secondary texts (such as the sort of commentaries expected on the examinations) according to certain fixed patterns. To deviate from these patterns was to express resistance against the Confucian tradition, at least in the eyes of those appointed to uphold orthodoxy. Huang responded to the writing of extravagant essays by printing a compendium of orthodox texts from the Ch'in to the Sung and distributing them to the students at the government schools in the metropolitan region.¹⁴⁸

Huang's book targeted the elite. A local magistrate might also publish books as part of his efforts to improve moral and practical customs among the common people. On the matter of public conduct, he might sponsor texts outlining correct rites, as the prefect of Ch'iung-chou did in the 1540s when he had *Ssu-li chieh-yao* (*Concise essentials of the four rituals*) printed and distributed to "alter the customs of Ch'iung-chou." A subsequent prefect who arrived in 1585 followed the same course by publishing *Yü Ch'iung li-yao* (*The essentials of ritual for Ch'iung-chou*).¹⁴⁹ On the matter of local production, he might issue agricultural handbooks, as the magistrate of a Yangchow county did when he printed an illustrated edition of the famous *Nung shu* (*Agricultural treatise*) of Wang Chen and had it distributed to improve local agricultural techniques.¹⁵⁰ In the latter case, the illustrations were crucial for communicating technology to the illiterate, as the text itself would have been accessible only to educated landlords.

The genre that local magistrates most consistently sponsored for publication was the gazetteer (*chih*). This formal record of all that pertained to the official realm of county life could take the county as its subject (*hsien-chih*); alternatively, it could focus on a prominent local site such as a famous mountain (*shan-chih*) or monastery (*ssu-chih*). Although the gazetteer was sometimes the private undertaking of a lone individual interested in chronicling the history of his native place or stimulating interest in a local site that was in need of investment,¹⁵¹ increasingly it became a public project in which the local magistrate was involved as editor or publisher. Included in the advice a 1411 *chü-jen* from Honan gave his son before the latter set off to take up his first posting as magistrate was the instruction to edit the county gazetteer and have it published. Publishing the gazetteer was, from his point of view, as much a part of a good magistrate's responsibility as providing a positive model for the local gentry, eschewing corruption, and abstaining from drun-

148 Ch'eng Meng-hsing, *Yang-chow fu-chih* (1733), 27, p. 20a, citing the 1523 prefectural gazetteer.

149 *Ch'iung-chow fu-chih* (1619), 9b, pp. 78b, 80a.

150 *Yang-chow fu-chih* (1733), 27, p. 21a.

151 E.g., monk I-jen in the early Ming compiled a gazetteer of Lung-ching Monastery outside Hangchow in the hope of encouraging later generations to rebuild it; Wang Meng-chün, *Lung-ching chien-wen lu* (after 1762, rpt. Wu-lin chang-ku ts'ung-pien, 1884), 8, p. 18a.

kenness while in office.¹⁵² Few gazetteers were actually published this early in the dynasty; they became near-universal throughout China only in the sixteenth century.

The prestige a county earned from having a gazetteer was matched by the prestige that accrued to the officials involved in the work. The desire to attach one's name to a gazetteer was so strong that the Wan-li era gazetteer of Ch'iung-chou prefecture (Hai-nan Island) in Kwangtung, an enormous work that runs to almost 1,300 pages and dates to about 1619, had to devote four entire pages to list everyone who claimed involvement in its production. The "Names of those who compiled the gazetteer" directly preceding the table of contents starts with the editor-in-chief (the vice-intendant of provincial education) followed by four assistant editors-in-chief (the prefect, the vice-prefect, the assistant prefect, and the prefectural judge), then thirteen editors (the magistrates of every sub-prefecture and county within Ch'iung-chou, minus Hui-t'ung county which was between appointments at the time), then ten copy-editors (four educational officials from the prefectural school, one from a sub-prefectural school, three from the prefectural county school, and an instructor and an assistant instructor from two lesser county schools), and finally three contributing editors and seven copywriter (students from the prefectural and county schools).¹⁵³ Who in this crowd of thirty-seven actually compiled the book? Fortunately, the editor-in-chief is magnanimous enough to tell the reader in his preface that there were seven authors. He names only five, one of whom does not even appear in this list. The other four do, however: they are the last two copy-editors (the instructor and assistant instructor from lesser county schools), and the first two copywriters (both of them students in the prefectural school). Presumably the other five copywriters and the three contributing editors also took part in the real work. In other words, the first three pages of names simply glorify the political shell within which the writers on the last page actually created the book. That shell was nonetheless important: it provided the momentum, and as well the funds, for seeing this history of Hai-nan Island into print. A refreshing note of realism is struck at the very end of the list of names. There, crammed into the last line of text in characters half the size of everyone else's, as befitted their diminutive status in the bureaucratic pyramid, appear the names of the three men who supervised the cutting of the woodblocks: Ch'en Ching-lun, Li Wen-ming, and Li Te-huan.

The work of producing a gazetteer was not inconsiderable. A colophon at the end of the 1536 prefectural gazetteer of Heng-chou, Hu-kuang, notes

152 Sun To, *Lu-shan hsien-chih* (1552), 10, p. 9b.

153 *Ch'iung-chou fu-chih* (1619), *hsing-shih*.

that the gazetteer was cut onto 200 blocks, and that the task required two calligraphers, three copyists, and six carvers (of whom two pairs were either brothers or first cousins).¹⁵⁴ To meet the cost of labor, wood, and paper, gazetteers were usually financed through subscriptions from local gentry, who would receive a copy of the book when it was printed. Print runs rarely went beyond a few hundred, but the blocks were carefully stored so that further copies could be run off when needed. One could thus apply to the yamen for a copy at a later date. When Hsü Hung-tsu arrived in the capital of Kwangsi prefecture in the thinly populated southeastern region of Yunnan province in mid-September 1638, he sent a letter to the prefect asking for a copy of the prefectural gazetteer. Three days later, the prefect answered to say that a copy would have to be printed. It would appear that the yamen had the woodblocks but no printed copies, though the delay may have been to see whether one could be found. Five days later, after being badgered daily by Hsü's servant, the prefect wrote to Hsü to apologize for the delay, saying that the clerks in charge of printing the book were slow and had damaged several of the blocks in the process. He promised that a copy would be delivered to him that afternoon, as indeed it was.¹⁵⁵ When a book was printed only on occasional demand, few copies ever got into circulation. Such appears to have been the case for this gazetteer, no copies of which have survived to the present.

Scholarly publishing

Wealthy gentry not only supported the production of works sponsored by their local magistrate; increasingly through the Ming they undertook their own publication projects. These were usually not for financial profit, but were claimed to be for scholarly purposes. Owners of rare books, for instance, began in the mid-Ming to enter the publishing world for the first time and arrange for the publication of new editions or facsimiles of these works. For example, Wang Yen-che (1483–1541) of Soochow produced a facsimile of a rare Sung woodblock edition of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's *Shih chi* in 1527. He made it from a copy he borrowed from someone who was hoping to sell it to Wang. Instead, Wang asked to borrow the book for a month, then hired carvers to cut new blocks and print several dozen copies. When the man came back to collect his book, Wang handed him one of these copies in order to test whether he could tell it was a reproduction. The man left without noticing but returned later, saying to Wang that this was indeed the Sung edition but

154 *Heng-chou fu-chih* (1536), 9, p. 14b.

155 Hsü Hung-tsu, *Hsü Hsia-k'oyu-chi*, pp. 687–91.

that the quality of the paper was not as good as the copy he had lent Wang and was there some mistake. Wang laughed and showed him the stack of books. We are led to believe that the man appreciated the humor of the trick, and got the original back.¹⁵⁶

Other collectors engaged in publishing books on a much larger scale than Wang Yen-che. His contemporary, the enormously wealthy An Kuo (1481–1534), started in about the year 1512 to print fine editions of numerous rare books in his collection, in addition to publishing texts by contemporaries, such as the poetry of the artist Shen Chou. Some of these were printed using movable bronze type. An Kuo's editions displayed great editorial care and were well received; they also displayed his own name prominently at the head of each *chüan* as well as at the top of the fold of each page.¹⁵⁷ His contribution to the communication of knowledge may thus be construed as something more than disinterested, and in this he was not exceptional among his peers. A fine book was a treasured object, bearing both cultural and commercial value for its owner.

A significant development in scholarly publishing in the late Ming was the publication of collectanea (*ts'ung-shu*). Some collectors were keen not to publish facsimiles of their rarest books piece by piece, but to bring them out as a series of matching editions. Some also chose to include their own writings in this series. For example, Wang Wen-lu, whose great library housing ten thousand *chüan* burned down in 1565, had by 1555 published fifty titles, of which he was the author of twelve. These he gave a *ts'ung-shu*-style title, *Chiu-ling hsüeh-shan*, in imitation of the prototypical Sung collectanea, *Pai-ch'uan hsüeh-hai*. By 1584, Wang had added another fifty titles, many of which again were his own works.¹⁵⁸ Given the cost of producing a collectanea, some scholars, like Ssu-ma T'ai (cs. 1523) of Nanking, compiled them without ever getting them into print. Ssu-ma compiled no less than five separate *ts'ung-shu* each comprising between thirty and a hundred *chüan*.¹⁵⁹ It was only when commercial publishers moved into this field early in the seventeenth century that any of them went into print. The best-known collectanea to be printed commercially in the late-Ming, the *Shuo fu*, as well as its continuation, the *Shuo fu hsü*, were both put into print for the first time by a Hangchow book dealer sometime between 1607 and 1620. Some of the woodblocks were damaged in the great Hangchow fire of 1621, and the publisher sold

156 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia shih-lüeh* (Peking, 1981), p. 127. DMB, p. 1346, working from a different source, says that Wang Yen-che took two years to produce the facsimile.

157 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia shih-lüeh*, p. 132; DMB, p. 11.

158 DMB, p. 1450.

159 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia shih-lüeh*, p. 131. The compilation of one of these *ts'ung-shu*, the *Hsü pai-ch'uan hsüeh-hai*, is usually credited to Wu Yung; Ssu-ma T'ai's role may have been that of sponsor.

off what survived to other publishers, who in turn incorporated these blocks into yet other *ts'ung-shu* of their own devising.¹⁶⁰

The other notable development in scholarly publishing in the late Ming, presaged by Wang Wen-lu's publishing activities, was self-publication. It was rare in the early Ming for someone to publish his memorials, essays, or jottings; that was considered work appropriate for his descendants. In the late Ming, however, writers took up publishing with a passion, sometimes putting their works together in a *ts'ung-shu* presentation. If an author were sufficiently prolific (and immodest) to produce several editions of his own writings through his lifetime, he often repeated the name each time, adding a term like "continued" (*hsü*) to link the collections together. Mao K'un (1512–1601), who produced several anthologies of historical writings in the old collectanea style, also published three collections of his own essays in 1565, 1584 (a *hsü* edition), and 1588. From these his family produced a complete edition of his prose works after he died.¹⁶¹ By the end of the dynasty, many an author did not even wait until his writings had accumulated to the point of producing his collected works but simply, as Ai Nan-ying's (1583–1646) grandson said of his prolific grandfather, "published as he wrote."¹⁶² The scale of publishing in the late Ming flooded the reading public, contributing to the uniquely rich and varied intellectual climate of the era.

Map publishing

The first map-making enterprise in the Ming was undertaken in 1373 when the Hung-wu emperor ordered that every region of the country submit maps, plus information on the administrative geography and local products of the region. This order was repeated a decade later with a call for more detailed information. By 1385, a large composite map of the entire country compiled from these submissions was on display at court, but it was never published. The Yung-lo emperor solicited a further round of geographical information in 1418 which, with later supplements, went into the making of the *Ta Ming i-p'ung chih* (*Comprehensive gazetteer of the Ming dynasty*) of 1461. Regrettably, the rough and underlabeled maps included in this compendium set a low standard for official cartography, and most subsequent gazetteers simply followed a style that favored symbolic over geometric renderings of spatial relationships.¹⁶³

160 DMB, p. 1271.

161 DMB, pp. 1046–47.

162 Cited in Brook, "Censorship in eighteenth-century China," p. 188.

163 Aoyama Sadao, "Ming-tai ti-t'u chih yen-chiu" (1940; trans. Lin Ssu, 1941; rpt. in *Ming-shih yen-chiu lun-ts'ung*, Taipei, 1985), Vol. 2, pp. 505–06.

Only in the following century, as interest in travel grew, did scholars begin to turn their attention to maps and publish atlases on an unprecedented scale. The trend began with the publication of some well-known regional atlases in the first half of the sixteenth century. These atlases were of areas of the country that were of strategic concern: the northern border region and the southeast coast. Mapping came to be regarded in the Chia-ching era as a useful way of focusing concerns about state border policies with regard to the growing harassments of the Mongols and the Japanese. Among the latter was *Ling-hai yü-t'u* (*Territorial atlas of Kwangtung and the ocean*), which Yao Yü (cs. 1532) compiled when he was investigating censor for that province; the preface of 1542 was by Chan Jo-shui. The most substantial coastal atlas of the Chia-ching era was Cheng Jo-tseng's massive *Ch'ou-hai t'u-pien* of 1561, previously mentioned in the section on route knowledge.

Among printed maps of the northern border, the most notable was *Chiu-pien t'u-lun* (*Critical atlas of the nine sections of the [northern] border*), which Hsü Lun (1494–1566), a secretary in the Ministry of Rites, submitted to the throne in 1537; the work was published the following year, and Hsü later elevated to the post of Minister of War. Four years later, Wei Huan (cs. 1529), head of the Bureau of Operations in the Ministry of War, submitted his *Chiu-pien k'ao* (*Study of the nine sections of the border*) to the throne; he had it printed the same year. Both were quickly recognized as standard works, and much consulted and reprinted. When the Lung-ch'ing emperor, in 1569, ordered Minister of War, Huo Chi, to produce a usable reference atlas of the northern border, the Bureau of Operations drew upon the atlases of both Hsü and Wei to compile *Chiu-pien t'u-shuo* (*Annotated atlas of the nine sections of the border*), which was printed the same year. Minister Huo notes that the *Annotated atlas* was not a straight copy, however. The Bureau of Operations required border military offices to submit their own maps, which it sent back for several revisions before incorporation into the atlas. To keep pace with further changes, the Ministry of War thenceforth required border offices to report changes annually, with the intention of updating the atlas every three years.¹⁶⁴

Another cartographic project that used Hsü's *Critical atlas* was the *Kuang-yü t'u* (*Enlarged territorial atlas*), which Lo Hung-hsien (whose two travel essays we had occasion to use in the preceding section) published in 1555. This was the first comprehensive atlas of China published in the Ming. Lo says that he based it on the large sheet map of China produced by Chu Ssu-pen

164 Huo Chi, ed., *Chiu-pien t'u-shuo* (1569), 1a–2b. Huo refers to Hsü's *Chiu-pien t'u-lun* as *Chiu-pien t'u-k'ao*. He mentions another official border atlas between Hsü Lun's and his own: the *Chiu-pien k'ao* which Wei Huan (cs. 1529), head of the Bureau of Operations in the Ministry of War, submitted to the throne in 1541.

(1273–1333), though the forty-five maps in his atlas exceed Chu's in scale and comprehensiveness. What is also distinctive about Lo's atlas is his use of the grid system or "dividing up into measured squares" (*hua-fang chi-li*), a technique first attested in 1261. The grid system involved sectioning the territory to be mapped into squares, surveying each of these squares, then compiling the separate surveys onto a comprehensive grid.

It was left to a Kwangtung scholar, rather than the court, to apply the grid system to map-making. The first attempt (and it seems the only attempt in the Ming) to apply Lo's system was done by Yeh Ch'un-chi, who, while still a student, traveled north to Kiangsi to meet Lo several times in 1550s. Through Lo, Yeh was introduced to Hsü Lun's *Critical atlas*, which he regarded as much inferior to Lo's. Yeh's contribution to Ming cartography was to take the grid method down from the national scale on which Lo had used it and to apply it at the county level: first for Hui-an county, Fukien, in 1573; then for Shun-te county, Kwangtung, in the following decade; and lastly for Yung-an county, also in his native Kwangtung, in 1586. The first of these was published as a separate work, the latter two as components of county gazetteers.¹⁶⁵ The grid system was not put into general practice until it was revived as a native competitor to European cartography in the nineteenth century, but it was revived for a competition it could only swiftly lose. Nonetheless, the wide publication of Lo's atlas, which went through at least six editions between 1555 and 1799, attests to the late-Ming enthusiasm for better maps, and a market for selling such maps.

Religious publishing

The history of printing in China began as a part of religious history. Reproducing a Buddhist text in writing was considered a meritorious act that had positive karmic consequences for the writer. Printing was developed as a technology that speeded up the rate of textual reproduction and the extent to which Buddhist images and texts could circulate in society. Ming Buddhists continued to avail themselves of printing technology to spread the Buddha's image and teachings. Little of this production survives, since it was mostly handbills and pamphlets produced on cheap paper and intended for mass consumption. A few printed images have survived from the seven-

165 For an examination of Yeh Ch'un-chi's cartography, see Timothy Brook, "Mapping knowledge in the sixteenth century: the gazetteer cartography of Ye Chunji," *Gest Library Journal* (1994). Yeh's maps of Yung-an have been examined in Bangbo Hu, "Maps in the *Gazetteer of Yung-an County*," *Gest Library Journal*, 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 85–100. Yeh's gazetteer of Shun-te appears to be lost; *Hui-an cheng-shu* and *Yung-an hsien-chih* survive only in single copies in Tokyo and Peking respectively, though the former was reprinted in Fu-chou in 1987.

teenth century because Europeans happened to acquire them in China and then reproduced them for the curious in the books they published once they returned home.

Buddhist monasteries were also active in acquiring and printing books, notably in the late Ming when monasteries were receiving financial patronage on a scale that had not been seen since the tenth century. Examples are legion, and one from Fu-chou will suffice. Wan-fu Monastery, Fu-chou's premier Ch'an establishment, was rebuilt in the Wan-li era after its destruction in the wave of coastal pirate raids in 1555. Once it was fully revived in 1601, the abbot petitioned the Wan-li emperor for a copy of the imperially printed *Tripitaka*. Thirteen years later, the emperor finally bestowed a copy, along with 300 ounces of gold from the imperial treasury, to build a structure to house the books. As this amount was insufficient to build a full library, Grand Secretary Yeh Hsiang-kao (1562–1627), then at home in retirement in Fu-chou prefecture, memorialized on behalf of the monks that they be permitted to raise additional funds. This request was granted, and the library was built the same year. Wan-fu was also an active religious publisher. From 1616 until the publication of its monastic gazetteer in 1637 (and perhaps beyond), Wan-fu published at least eighteen books, from standard religious works, like sutras and selected quotations of Buddhist masters, to more “practical” publications, including a handbook of rules for daily life in a monastery and a reprinting of a classic essay from the Yüan dynasty on the relationship among Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism (presumably intended for circulation among Huang-po's prominent lay gentry patrons).¹⁶⁶

Commercial publishing

However much monks, scholars, or officials engaged in publishing, the main source of books in the Ming were commercial publishers. They did a lively trade that only expanded as the dynasty progressed and the literate market for books grew. Commercial publishing in the mid-Ming was driven in part by what the court was printing, for almost every book that came out in a palace edition soon appeared in a commercial edition as well. Imperial printing identified significant texts, and commercial printing, to a large extent,

166 Hsing-chi and Hsing-yüan, *Huang-po ssu-chih* (1637), 1, p. 2a–b, 3, p. 24a–b. The handbook was *Pi-ni jih-yung* (*Daily-use handbook of Vinaya rules*) (Fu-ch'ing, 1633); the Yüan dynasty essay was Liu Mi, *San-chiao p'ing-hsin lun* (*Viewing the Three Teachings with a balanced mind*) (1324, rpt. Fu-ch'ing, 1637). The latter text is discussed in Timothy Brook, “Rethinking syncretism: the unity of the three teachings and their joint worship in late-imperial China,” *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 21 (1993).

made it possible for this significance to be sustained in society at large.¹⁶⁷ The widespread commercial reprinting of classics and palace editions helped to establish a core set of official books that “most scholars” could be expected to own, according to the Fukien scholar-official Chang Yüeh (1492–1553). This basic set included the Hung-wu printings of the abridged Confucian canon and the standard dynastic histories as well as the *Ming code* and *Ming regulations*.¹⁶⁸

Commercial publishers, unlike the palace, produced cheap editions in large volume. They also developed much different publishing lists. While they pirated the canon, much of their production was geared to the lower end of the literate market. They generally eschewed works of high scholarship unless these were in demand for examination purposes. More favored were simpler publications like examination primers, almanacs, and guides to conduct. A scandalized reference to law books in the hands of the unscrupulous in an unpublished mid-sixteenth-century gazetteer suggests that this genre was also widely available and, by implication, to those who would like to manipulate the law to their own advantage.¹⁶⁹

By the late Ming, publishing houses had sprung up in all major cities. The center of the publishing industry, as of the book-buying market, was Chiang-nan, and the main publishers were located in Soochow, Hangchow, Nanking, and Hu-chou. Publishing was also important in Peking to supply the book-buying habits of officials and students alike. But the core of the industry turning out mass-produced books was centered in the northern Fukien interior in specialized printing towns like Chien-yang. The key factor in this region was its proximity, not to a market, but to a source of the abundant raw material, bamboo, from which inexpensive paper was made.¹⁷⁰

The expansion of commercial printing in the late Ming presumed a growing market, as the ranks of the literate swelled at the lower end of the social scale. Producing for an audience less interested in canonical literature, commercial publishers devised new types of texts appropriate to the new reading public, texts like – to name but a few categories – route books, almanacs, primers, moral tracts, novels, plays, erotica, joke books, collections of letters

167 *Wu-lun-shu* (1443) was printed privately seven years after it first appeared in a palace edition, by a Peking bookseller named Liu. Li Hsien, ed., *Ta Ming i-t'ung chib* (1461; rpt. Taipei, 1965), perhaps because of its size, did not appear commercially until Shen-tu Chai printed it in 1505; but just three years later, another Peking publisher, Hung-chang T'ang, produced a second edition. Regarding the 1505 edition of the *Ta Ming i-t'ung chib*, see Wolfgang Franke, *An Introduction to the Sources of Ming History* (Kuala Lumpur, 1968), p. 237.

168 Chang Yüeh, *Hui-an hsien-chib* (1530), 9, p. 10a. The comment may not be Chang's own, for it is repeated verbatim thirty-four years later in a Hu-kuang county gazetteer: Ch'en Kuang-ch'ien, *Tz'u-li hsien-chib* (1574), 11, p. 14a.

169 Ts'ai Kuang-chien, *Ch'ung-chou fu-chib* (1619), 3, p. 88b.

170 Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, *Paper and Printing*, pp. 49–50.

edifying and otherwise, and accounts of foreign customs. An example of the last category was produced by the Shen family of Hu-chou, which operated a publishing concern called Keng-chih Kuan (House for tilling prosperity). One of the family, Shen Mao-shang, compiled a series of four two-*chüan* collections (*kuang-chi*), the contents of which he drew indiscriminately from a wide range of pre-existing texts, dealing with foreign customs and languages in Korea and Japan (*Ch'ao-hsien kuang-chi*), Mongolia (*pei-ti kuang-chi*), Inner Asia (*Hsi-i kuang-chi*), and the maritime countries from Vietnam to France (*Hai-kuo kuang-chi*). The House for Tilling Prosperity brought out at least the last of these in 1579, and probably the entire set. Another of the family, Shen Mao-kuan, probably a brother, drew on a similar body of knowledge to put together *Hua-i hua-mu niao-shou chen-wan k'ao* (*An examination of flora, fauna, and rarities Chinese and foreign*) in ten *chüan*.¹⁷¹

This sort of recycling of a common body of knowledge in different forms signals a reading public eager to consume books that addressed noncanonical matters. This audience was most certainly not limited to the lesser educated. As a young student being drilled in the canon, Hsü Hung-tsu consumed just such commercial literature. The author of his posthumous tomb essay says, certainly without embarrassment and almost with pride, that Hsü “developed a love for unusual books. Ancient and modern history, books on geography and topography, pictures of mountains and seas [maps], as well as books on Taoism and hermits were his favorite reading. These he would place under the Classics and read surreptitiously.”¹⁷²

Book collecting

Books in the early Ming were not the cheap commodities they would later become, and one had to be wealthy to have the pleasure of owning a lot of them. The connection between wealth and books was assumed by the Yung-lo emperor, who observed in 1406 that “few gentry or commoner families have the extra resources” to collect books.¹⁷³ The palace was by far the largest owner of books. The imperial collection, in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, amounted to 20,000 titles totaling close to a million *chüan* (chapters or fascicles).¹⁷⁴ Among the people, book-collecting was a

171 From descriptions of these texts by Hsiang Ta, cited in, *Cheng Ho hsia hsi-yang tzu-liao hui-pien*, eds. Cheng Ho-sheng and Cheng I-chün (Chi-nan, 1980), Vol. 1, pp. 306–07.

172 Quoted in Li Chi, *The travel diaries of Hsü Hsia-k'o*, p. 16.

173 *MS*, p. 2343. 174 *MS*, p. 2343.

hobby only for the wealthy. A collection of several thousand *chüan* was considered large, and anything over 10,000 quite remarkable.¹⁷⁵

This situation began to change in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Evidence of the growing place that book collections came to have in the lives of mid-Ming intellectuals can be drawn from the experience of the great statecraft scholar, Ch'iu Chün. As a native of distant Hai-nan Island, Ch'iu experienced this development in negative terms when he was a young man. Prior to his father's death in 1426, when Ch'iu Chün was only six years old, his family owned several hundred *chüan* of books, a significant collection for Hai-nan Island. People helped themselves to the collection after his father died, and Ch'iu was able to recover only fragments of it when he grew older. He was able to borrow books from booksellers to pursue his education, though he complained that at that time – the late 1430s and early 1440s – “the books on the market were mostly low-brow, miscellaneous works, so those [of any academic merit] that I was able to acquire amounted to only a handful.” Clearly, at this time in the distant south, books that were more than light entertainment were difficult to obtain. A student in the far south, far more so than a student in Chiang-nan, had to rely on books to obtain knowledge; yet his location relative to the established centers of learning and book production made it difficult to get hold of them. Ch'iu thus felt himself at a double handicap.

In Chiang-nan, private holdings in the thousands of *chüan* were becoming more common in the mid-Ming.¹⁷⁶ A few collectors attained or even exceeded the prestigious number of 10,000 *chüan*, and they constructed buildings to serve as libraries for their collections.¹⁷⁷ Significantly, two of the families that amassed impressive mid-Ming collections, the Feng family of Ning-po (whose collection was later bought by the Fan family and became the core of their justly famous T'ien-i Ko library) and the Yü family of Shanghai, both housed their books in buildings they named Wan-chüan Lou, or Library of Ten Thousand *Chüan*.¹⁷⁸ These private libraries served as places where scholars could meet to share intellectual and social interests. I K'an's (cs. 1436) book-laden residence on the west side of Soochow, for instance, was a common meeting place for scholars from the surrounding prefectures during the third quarter of the fifteenth century.¹⁷⁹

175 See, for example, Wu Han, *Chiang Cbe ts'ang-shu-chia shih-lüeh* (Peking, 1941), p. 44, referring to the collection of Chin Hua of Ning-po.

176 E.g., the study of Li Min, an official from Honan, was stocked with several thousand *chüan*; *Hsü-chou chih* (1540), 4, p. 12b.

177 Wu Han, *Chiang Cbe ts'ang-shu-chia*, pp. 10, 22, 145, 155, 229, 232.

178 Wu Han, *Chiang Cbe ts'ang-shu-chia*, pp. 112, 160.

179 Wu Han, *Chiang Cbe ts'ang-shu-chia*, p. 132.

To collect books in such numbers is to own them beyond one's needs or capacities as a reader; to display them, a strategy for publicizing one's scholarship and wisdom – and often one's wealth, at a time when a rare Sung edition could be offered for sale at the considerable price of 300 taels.¹⁸⁰ A large library was testimony not just of wealth, but of wealth's being put to good use: wealth and erudition in happy combination. The competition for status played out in the realm of book collecting could go beyond mere wealth, as collectors vied with each other to obtain copies of books that were not on the market and that money could not buy: pre-Ming editions that existed in only one copy, or only in manuscript, and which had not yet been reproduced by a commercial press and could only be obtained by being copied out by hand. The early-Ch'ing scholar Chu I-tsun (1629–1709) notes this in his comments on the world of the Soochow literary elite at the turn of the sixteenth century: “At this time, most of the book collectors of Soochow valued unpublished volumes, so collectors like Chu Ts'un-li (1444–1513), Wu K'uan (1436–1504), Yen Ch'i-shan (d. 1507), and Tu Mu (1459–1525) all made copies by hand.”¹⁸¹ All but Yen Ch'i-shan were men of great wealth. Yen was a poor man who built his collection in large part by copying rare books that other people owned, but he did so with such discernment and on such a scale that his collection vied with those of his wealthier associates.

Yen was an exception. Most of the great private libraries of Soochow, like the great collections of antiquities in the mid-Ming, were in the hands of the upper elite, men like Shih Chien (cs. 1499) who, “when guests arrived, set out for their scrutiny and appreciation artefacts from the Three Dynasties (Hsia, Shang, and Chou) and the Ch'in and Han, and books and paintings from the T'ang and Sung.”¹⁸² By associating the collection of books with the ownership of other types of expensive cultural objects, the author of this passage signals the extent to which rare books had an identity as heightened objects of exchange: as social objects, bearing and transmitting messages about status. The identity of books as objects through which information is stored and communicated has all but evaporated in this environment, though the scholarly value imputed to books could continue to confuse or screen this manipulation in the eyes of social inferiors who were conscious that they were excluded from the realm of rare books, but could not have expressed how that exclusion was being carried out, aside from the obvious

180 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia*, p. 126.

181 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia*, p. 141, quoting Chu I-tsun, *Ching-chih chü shih-hua* (1819). Regarding Yen Ch'i-shan, see also p. 223.

182 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia*, p. 130.

matter of cost. By absorbing the investment of symbolic capital, books served the mobility not of information but of social status.

By the late Ming, 10,000 *chüan* was no longer the upper limit of the largest collections, and bibliophiles began boasting of owning 30,000, 40,000, even 50,000 *chüan*.¹⁸³ Possibly the largest collection was that of the Yangchow scholar Ko Chien, who owned 10,000 *titles*, not *chüan*.¹⁸⁴ Book-collecting in the late Ming also became more eclectic than it had been in the mid-Ming. Rare Sung woodblock editions and manuscripts continued to attract collectors and fetch high prices, but less canonical texts also became popular with some collectors. The reclusive but enormously wealthy scholar Shen Ch'i-yüan (cs. 1559), widely respected for the breadth of his knowledge, "did not neglect to go after even books on medicine, pharmacology, and divination,"¹⁸⁵ categories outside the formal canon of respectable knowledge. There was a touch of eccentricity to Shen that was acceptable in a bibliophile. Wang Kuang-ching (cs. 1607) could thus be praised for "having no other hobby in his life. He just collected ten thousand *chüan*. His hand could not put a book down."¹⁸⁶ The power of Wang's feeling for books is communicated in the biographies of other late-Ming bibliophiles, which for the first time describe an attachment to books as an "obsession" (*p'i*), the same term Yüan Hung-tao used to characterize the late-Ming gentry's love of travel.

The building of school libraries

Just as private collectors were acquiring books on an unprecedented scale from the mid-Ming forward, so too public institutions such as schools were able to build collections of books, often for the first time. The catalogue of books owned by the prefectural school in Ho-chien, Pei Chihli, consists of seventy-three entries, to which have been appended brief notes regarding the history of their acquisition. Twelve titles, primarily the Great Compendia and various Hung-wu imperial texts, were "deposited a long time ago." Three Chia-ching palace editions, including the *Great canon on illuminated virtue* and the *Collected rites of the great Ming*, were "presented," presumably by the court. The rest of the school's books were acquired by two prefects: nineteen books by the prefect who held office between 1529 and 1533, and the remaining forty-two by the prefect who refurbished one of the halls of the prefectural school in 1539.¹⁸⁷ The 1529–33 purchase included copies of the *Comprehensive*

183 See Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia*, pp. 59, 126, 140.

184 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia*, p. 205.

185 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia*, p. 32.

186 Wu Han, *Chiang Che ts'ang-shu-chia*, p. 11.

187 P'an Shen, *Ho-chien fu-chih* (1540), 28, pp. 58b–59b; also 5, p. 1b; 17, p. 15b.

gazetteer of the Ming dynasty, the *Collected statutes of the Ming dynasty*, and Ch'iu Chün's *Supplement to the exposition on "The Great Learning"*, plus the *Shih chi* and a good selection of Sung writings. The 1539 acquisition included new copies of the *Great Compendia* and several other titles previously in the collection (presumably to replace lost or damaged copies) as well as a complete set of the twenty-one dynastic histories plus a broad range of philosophical and literary anthologies. A title worth noting is *Wu-ching pai-wen* (*The five classics in vernacular texts*), a set of colloquial translations of the classics a student was supposed to master, acquired presumably as a device for teaching the less advanced: the canon could be edited inside the educational system without meeting opposition.

Most schools, it seems, came into possession of reasonably large numbers of books in the mid-Ming, presumably because of their increasing availability. As of 1568, the state school in Jui-ch'ang county, Kiangsi, had thirty-two titles totaling 816 *chüan*.¹⁸⁸ The county school in Jui-chin county, deep in the Kiangsi interior, had forty-one titles.¹⁸⁹ The catalogue of the Ho-chien prefectural school had seventy-three entries, as already noted, though the actual number of titles was higher since all twenty-one standard dynastic histories, which amounted to 2,917 *chüan*, were entered in the catalogue as one entry. The total holdings for Ho-chien thus must have approached 4,000 *chüan*. By contemporary European standards, a collection of this size was stunning: Cambridge University Library in 1424 had only 122 volumes. Compared to the great private collections in China, however, the Ho-chien library was small. It should also be borne in mind that many schools had even fewer books. The prefectural and county schools in Ch'ang-te prefecture, Hu-kuang, had between nine and eleven titles each, and almost all the same titles: Yung-lo's *Great compendia* and didactic primers and Hsüan-te's *On the five relationships*; and in the Wu-ling county school, one copy of the Chia-ching emperor's *Collected deliberations on the great rites controversy*.¹⁹⁰

As schools came to own books in such quantities, they faced the problem of keeping them dry, in order, and under supervision. Standard practice was to store them in wooden cabinets, which were then kept in buildings dedicated to other uses. But as the numbers of books schools owned expanded, and perhaps as the desire to display them increased, schools began to construct buildings solely for the use of housing books. This is what Ch'iu Chün, the disadvantaged young scholar from Hai-nan, had to do when he decided to

188 Hsieh Ku, *Jui-ch'ang hsien-chib* (1568), 5, pp. 6a-7a; the total number of *chüan* does not include 17 that were reported as missing.

189 *Jui-chin hsien-chib* (1542), 3, pp. 3a-4a.

190 Ch'en Hung-mo, *Ch'ang-te fu-chib* (1538), 9, p. 4a-11b. More data on libraries of schools and "academies" are available in Ma Tailoi, "Private Academies in Ming China" Diss., Chicago, 1987.

donate a collection of books for the use of students at the prefectural library when he was home on leave in 1472: he built a library. Because of the problem that humidity in south China posed for book storage, he had it built entirely of stone. Only the cabinets themselves were made of wood. The Stone Chamber, as Ch'iu called this library, was "a narrow place from which one can grasp the breadth of all within the four seas." The books he placed there were the means "to grasp the world for ten thousand *li* from within the space of one room." His choice of distance metaphors shows that this donation was made from an awareness of the problems that distance imposed on the communication of knowledge. With a library available to him, a student far from the centers of academic knowledge production now had the power to transcend the limitation of distance.¹⁹¹

The mid-Ming marks the first time in which school libraries were being built in China in large numbers. Sometimes this was done in a modest way: the assistant prefect of Chi-an, Kiangsi, in 1468 converted the dining hall of the Lung-ch'üan county school, only ten years old, into a "pavilion for imperial books" (*yü-shu ko*) "in order to store the classics that had been bestowed."¹⁹² The term that came into commonest use for school libraries was *tsun-ching ko*, or "pavilion for revering the classics."

School libraries before 1468 were relatively rare.¹⁹³ The first were built in the 1430s and 1440s,¹⁹⁴ though the building trend did not really become widely established for several more decades. Prefectural schools were generally the first to acquire a library, county schools later. The building of school libraries indicates that schools from the mid-Ming forward were acquiring sufficient books to present a storage problem. Schools in the early Ming had received the books published and distributed by the state, but they tended not to acquire privately printed books. The expansion of commercial publish-

191 Ch'iu's record of building this library is included in *Ch'üung-chou fu-chih* (ca. 1619), 11, p. 26b; rpt. in Li Hsi and Ts'ai Fan, *Ch'üung-shan hsien-chih* (1917), 14, pp. 37a-40a. The Stone Chamber served as the school library for over a century; it was replaced in 1614.

192 Chang Shih-yü, *Lung-ch'üan hsien-chih* (1878), 5, pp. 2a-3a; note that the term *yü-shu ko* was usually reserved for pavilions where a piece of imperial calligraphy was displayed.

193 An unsystematic search has turned up positive evidence of school libraries predating 1431 in only three prefectures, Yangchow in Nan Chihli, Yen-chou in Chekiang, and Yüan-chou in Kiangsi. In Yüan-chou, the library of the prefectural school was built in 1339, and libraries of two of its counties in 1395 and 1396 respectively; Yen Sung, *Yüan-chou fu-chih* (1514), 4, pp. 6b-9b. In Yangchow, a pre-existing school library was replaced in the Cheng-t'ung era (1436-49); *Yangchow fu-chih* (1733), 12, p. 3b. And T'ung-lu county in Yen-chou had a Pavilion for Imperial Books predating the Ming; *Yen-chou fu-chih* (1613), 3, p. 16a.

194 School libraries founded in the 1430s: *Yangchow fu-chih* (1733), 12, p. 10a; *Yen-chou fu-chih* (1613), 3, p. 12a. School libraries founded in the 1440s (or the Cheng-t'ung era more generally): Liu Wu, *Hui-chou fu-chih* (1542), 7, pp. 2a, 16b; Wang Chia-shih, *Kuang-shan hsien-chih* (1556), 1, p. 27b; *Hu-chou fu-chih* (1877), 11, p. 22a. The development of school libraries in the mid-Ming is discussed in Timothy Brook, "Edifying knowledge: The building of school libraries in the Ming Dynasty," *Late Imperial China*, 17, No. 1 (June 1996).

ing had changed that. At the same time, mid-Ming scholars recognized that the lack of libraries in the early Ming meant that schools tended more easily to lose the books in their possession.¹⁹⁵ Such an observation would not have occurred to a commentator writing a century earlier, before the library became a common alternative to unsegregated storage.

Library-building through the mid- to late-Ming left China with many more libraries at the end of the dynasty than it had had in the beginning. Again, a comparison with Europe is striking. It certainly struck seventeenth-century European visitors to China. Drawing on their observations, du Halde was moved to remark upon “the great number of Libraries in *China* magnificently built, finely adorn’d, and enrich’d with a prodigious Collection of Books.”¹⁹⁶

COMMERCE

The natural imbalance between regions within an agricultural society and the practice of extracting revenue from an expansive territory mean that the economy of a large agrarian state must, to some extent, be commercial. China’s had been since at least the Warring States period. The rapid and profound expansion of the Chinese commercial economy in the Ming dynasty did not mark a sudden departure from earlier periods, nor was it entirely unique to the Ming. Yet the scale of this commercialization, and the power it had in shaping and altering social life, suggest that, if China had in some sense seen it all before, it had never seen it to quite this extent. The changes that have been noted in the preceding sections in the circulation of people, goods, and knowledge only make sense in relation to commerce’s remaking of social and economic life.

These changes were not part of the founder’s plan. Hung-wu’s vision of village life was of a village economy self-sufficient and self-sustaining. Women produced the cloth that was needed for clothing, men the crops that were needed for food; whatever else they required could be picked from the garden and gleaned from the hills. The picture of isolation and contentment was a helpful vision – or, from another vantage point, a necessary illusion – to allay the anxieties of those who ruled, assuring them that the stability they yearned for at the political level was obediently underpinned by a pleasant bucolic stagnation at the bottom of society.

Even in the first years of the dynasty it was otherwise. It had to be otherwise. The circulation of commercial goods may have slowed in the early years of the Ming, but that had more to do with the disruptions of war than

195 Chang Yüeh, *Hui-an hsien-chih* (1530), 9, p. 10a.

196 Jean Baptiste du Halde, *The General History of China* (London, 1741), Vol. 3, p. 63.

the regulations imposed on village life. Once the state itself had restored and expanded the transportation systems, the pace and ease with which goods, state or otherwise, could move only increased. The commercial activity of preceding dynasties coupled with the infrastructural investments of the new dynasty explain in part why the Ming was set to become a period of outstanding commercial growth.

Commerce and the Ming state

To his credit, the Hung-wu emperor was not ignorant of the economic functions of commerce. He was willing to permit merchants a relatively free hand in buying, moving, and selling the goods they chose, aside from a few items controlled under state monopoly. The main concern of his regime was that merchants be registered. The Ming did not create a registration category for merchants that would set them apart, as it did for artisans, though the *Ming code* applies to certain categories of commercial handlers the same strictures regarding heredity that applied to artisans. Brokers and wharf agents, for instance, had, by law, to be only from families already engaged in that business, and they and their dealings were supposed to be registered with the local government where they worked. The names of itinerant merchants, along with a description of the goods they were carrying, were supposed to be recorded in registers kept by local brokers and inspected once a month by officials. This system of registration depended on the assumption that outside merchants would never attempt to do business without a local agent. In any case, we know that none of the Ming regulations (borrowed from those of the Yüan) trying to impose hereditary occupational status ever worked. None was enforced, and other more natural means of allowing people to fill occupational categories were adopted.

Hung-wu extended some control over commerce out of his concern about price-fixing. Having experienced the inflation that raged at the end of the Yüan dynasty, the emperor regarded the stabilization of commodity prices as a major goal of his regime. Merchants figured in his price-control policies. He required that they should buy and sell only at fair market prices. The *Ming code* stipulates that merchants who price their goods unfairly will be liable for punishment under the laws governing bribery, the penalty based to the amount by which their selling price departs from the market price. That market price was to be determined by local officials, who were required in the first ten days of every month to go into the local market and compile a list of prices. Merchants who monopolized goods on a local market to create artificially high prices were liable to a flogging of eighty blows. To provide additional protection for the consumer, merchants were to use only weights and

measures that conformed to regulation sizes. Also, they should sell only manufactured items of good quality, otherwise the retailers (not the producers) were liable to punishment.¹⁹⁷

Whatever recognition early Ming law gave to commerce, Hung-wu's schemes for revitalizing the economy on a petty-peasant basis did not factor it in. Peasants were to be confined to small communities, devote themselves to agriculture, and not look beyond their horizons. Once rural stability had been reestablished, however, peasants producing for their own subsistence found that, in good years, something was left over, and they were willing to trade their surplus. If merchants simply served the role of circulating surplus without manipulating the market to defraud producers or consumers, as the suspicious usually charged them with doing, then they had a purpose in the economic scheme of things. The thin edge of the wedge – the point of transition from the self-sufficient to the commercial economy in the early Ming – is not to be found in the moral quality of its merchants, however, but in the nature of how property behaves under conditions of relatively free exchange. Hung-wu's schemes to rebuild the countryside as a patchwork of closed communities projected a simplistic egalitarian ideal onto a complex reality, masking complications that would, and did, ramify in the longer run. No complex economy remains unchanging in the presence of the disparities that invariably exist between regions, nor in the face of the gaps that unavoidably grow between rich and poor. As long as there are no prohibitions on buying and selling, these disparities and gaps will cause goods, and eventually labor, to be bought and sold. Hung-wu assumed that commerce would remain within urban areas and did not consider legislating a place for it in the rural sector, which is precisely where commerce within the Chinese agrarian state arises.

In balance, the Ming state chose neither to restrict nor encourage commerce. It provided no institutions to service commercial exchanges, monitor commercial transactions, nor guarantee financial agreements; nor did it block such exchanges, transactions, or agreements. It did contribute conditions favorable to commerce, albeit indirectly: reopening the Grand Canal, for instance; allowing tribute grain boatmen to trade in private goods in preference to paying them an adequate wage; switching from taxes in kind to taxes in silver, as it would do in the mid-Ming. But the effects that would follow from these policies by and large were unintentional. In part the policies were a matter of ideology (the Confucian disdain for commerce), in part a

197 *TML*, 10, pp. 1a–10b; *MHT*, *chüan* 37; see also Su Keng-sheng, “Ming-ch’u ti shang-cheng yü shang-shui,” *Ming-shih yen-chiu lun-ts’ung*, ed. Wu Chih-ho (Taipei, 1983), Vol. 2, p. 436.

matter of not extracting from the economy the resources necessary for actively shaping it (the policy known as “storing the wealth with the people”).

Content with a mildly parasitic relationship to commerce, the Ming state could believe it was preserving an ancient agrarian ideal and not worry itself about shaping the economy in relation to new forces. This vaguely benign attitude to commerce seems to have been in harmony with popular attitudes. Despite the Confucian habit of regarding the presence of merchants in local society as a sign that something was amiss, early Ming authors in the more commercialized regions of the country were content to simply note their presence and accept it. The long-established presence of merchants in the city of Yangchow, the main commercial center on the Grand Canal just north of the Yangtze River, did not disturb the compiler of the late-fourteenth-century gazetteer of Chiang-tu, Yangchow’s capital county. “Chiang-tu being the major artery of communication between the Huai and Yangtze rivers,” he observed, “people by custom are pleased to work as merchants and do not pursue agriculture. Itinerant merchants from the four quarters live in their midst. People here are wealthier than in all other counties” of the prefecture.¹⁹⁸

The unwillingness of the Ming state to join in the traditional Confucian contempt for commerce translated, at the level of policy, into an implicit preference to let the market, rather than the state, regulate the exchange of commodities, within limits. This position is defended most explicitly in the mid-Ming in Ch’iu Chün’s *Ta-bsüeh yen-i pu* (Supplement to the exposition on *The Great Learning*). In this book, Ch’iu lays out explicit views regarding the roles of the market versus those of the state in the commercial economy.¹⁹⁹ His first essay in the twenty-fifth chapter, on market regulations, explains what a market is: a central place where people whose conditions of livelihood allow them to produce more of one thing and less of another meet and exchange their surplus with those whose different conditions of livelihood provide them with different surpluses and lacks. This describes a barter market rather than a commercial market: Ch’iu purposefully leaves out both merchants and the state so that he can add them in separately to demonstrate the realm of action appropriate to each. Ch’iu accepted the traditional Chinese view that the state should intervene in matters affecting food supply when the people’s subsistence is threatened. But he disagreed that the state should

198 Quoted in *Yangchow fu-chib* (1733), 10, p. 10a.

199 Ch’iu Chün, *Ta-bsüeh yen-i pu* (1506; rpt. Taipei, 1971), esp. 25, pp. 1b–28b; cf. the discussion of Ch’iu Chün’s economic philosophy in Pierre-Étienne Will and R. Bin Wong, *Nourish the people: the state civilian granary system in China, 1650–1850* (Ann Arbor, 1991), pp. 11–13. The most thorough study of Ch’iu’s thought in English is Chu Hung-lam, “Ch’iu Ch’ün (1421–95) and the *Ta-bsüeh yen-i pu*: statecraft thought in fifteenth-century China” Diss., Princeton University, 1983.

manipulate the economy in order to equalize rich and poor, which had been a justification for intervention popular with many reformers, including the Hung-wu emperor, although he goes unnamed. In Ch'iu's view, it was fallacious to charge merchants with responsibility for the differentiation of rich and poor; that was the product of state policies restricting commerce.²⁰⁰ Forcing merchants out of the market will not eradicate that distinction.

Marketing should thus be entirely a matter for merchants. Ch'iu allows that merchant activity can have negative influence over popular customs, making possible the conspicuous consumption that Ch'iu, like all Confucians, regarded as deleterious to the moral fiber of the people; but, in the same breath, he also points out that merchant activity determines the extent to which the state can muster the resources it needs. Without merchants, the economy that the state relies on for its fiscal viability would simply not function. For the state to take over marketing from merchants, on the other hand, is a recipe for disaster. "When the people operate their own markets, they can readily negotiate quality and price to determine whether or not to buy something. When officials operate markets for people, quality and prices are invariably fixed, yet self-interest and hidden dealings crop up all over the place. To operate [a state market] that produces profit and avoids corruption is difficult. The better course is for state administration not to get involved."²⁰¹

The language of Confucianism obliged Ch'iu to recur in the phrasing of his argument against state intervention in the economy to the *locus classicus* of all discussions on "profit" (*li*): Mencius' chastisement of King Hui of Liang for mentioning the word profit in his welcoming statement regarding what he hoped Mencius' advice could do for him, when he should be concerned exclusively with "benevolence" (*jen*) and "righteousness" (*i*). At the hands of most Confucian writers on political economy, Mencius' contempt for profit had been used to denigrate merchants and condemn commercialization whenever it appeared to be encroaching on the ideal of agricultural self-sufficiency that the Hung-wu emperor desired to see return to his realm. Ch'iu, however, turns the discourse against Confucian anticommercialism by reestablishing the original context in which Mencius made his famous observation on profit, which was with regard to the undertakings appropriate to a state. Ch'iu contrasts profit with righteousness (better translated in the Ming context as charity), which seeks to provide benefits to the public, whereas profit he understood as being the acquisition of benefits for oneself. He refrains, however, from passing moral judgment on profit, realizing that merchants

200 Ch'iu Chün, *Ta-hsiieh yen-i pu*, 28, p. 6b.

201 Ch'iu Chün, *Ta-hsiieh yen-i pu*, 25, p. 13b.

would not do the work they did were no profits involved; what he identifies as morally unacceptable is the pursuit of profit by the state.²⁰² The state should not be in the business of making a profit on the exchange of necessities. That is what merchants were for.

Believing that merchants did a better job of redistributing commodities and balancing supply and demand than did the state, Ch'iu went on to argue against practices that had been accepted into the repertoire of the Chinese state. The state should not run handicraft industries, but should let merchants manage their production. The state should not monopolize necessities like salt for the sake of raising revenue, but allow salt to circulate on the open market and rely instead on land-based taxation for its income. (Ch'iu accepted the Ming monopoly on tea because it was tied to border preparedness and did not touch the circulation of the commodity among the people.) If anything promoted the differentiation of rich and poor, according to Ch'iu, it was the tactic of squeezing revenue out of restricted commodities. The state should also lift its ban on sea transport and encourage maritime trade – a position that became increasingly popular in the sixteenth century and was finally realized in the 1560s.

When security concerns were involved, as they were with the monopolies and the coastal ban, the Ming state would not accede to Ch'iu Chün's suggestions. Otherwise, Ch'iu's model of limited state interference in the economy was not out of keeping with Ming policy. The relatively low level of commercial taxation would confirm this. Tax-collection bureaus (*shui-ke'o chü*) were set up in every county of the realm to collect a commercial tax (*shang-shui*), but at a rate of only 3.3 percent. Many of these bureaus were later abolished, though the commercial tax survived as a fixed quota in county budgets. Furthermore, because the Ming tax system was quota-based rather than universal, officials were charged with collecting commodity taxes only to meet the quota. The problem for commercial revenue was that the quota may have been set decades previously when the volume of traffic passing a particular customs post was much lower and the expected receipts much less. What a tax collector did after his collections had met the quota was a matter of discretion. A tax collector appointed in 1521 to the Yangtze port of Ching-chou is praised in the official history of the dynasty for suspending taxation after meeting his annual quota in the first three months, thereafter allowing commercial vessels to pass the customs post without paying tax. The basis for his biographer's judgment was not the extent to which he was able to help finance state operations, but rather the extent of his compassionate willingness to let the people's wealth remain in their own hands, ever a virtue in

202 Ch'iu Chün, *Ta-hsüeh-yen-i pu*, 25, p. 7b.

formal Chinese thinking about taxation.²⁰³ The underlying assumption, not unreasonable, given contemporary practice, was that an official who went on collecting tax above quota simply pocketed the receipts and did not reinvest what he collected in the economy.

Under increasing pressure to finance itself, the Ming court, in the latter half of the dynasty, did turn to commercial taxation for quick revenue, setting up new commercial tax bureaus and staffing them, not with regular fiscal officials, but with eunuchs who could funnel the proceeds directly to the imperial household. In 1515, the Cheng-te emperor ordered that new commercial tax bureaus be set up at major bridges and fords in Han-yang prefecture and dispatched the eunuch Chao T'ien and officers of the Embroidered Guard to impose levies on all commercial boat traffic in the prefecture. Only after the reign of the Cheng-te emperor did a provincial censor finally dare to ask that these bureaus be closed down "because they bring trouble to merchants." To put an official seal of approval on their suspension, the censor erected a stele in 1528 declaring that the bureaus were no longer in operation.²⁰⁴ The court thus fluctuated in its fiscal relationship with commerce, sometimes exploiting it, at other times removing obstacles to it, but never really incorporating it into its fiscal or economic strategies. Sometimes local officials, also pressed to meet expenses, looked, as Cheng-te did, to commerce. The town of Cheng-yang, within the Hung-wu emperor's home prefecture of Feng-yang, was the most thriving commercial town on the Huai River, being the place where wholesale merchants (who moored on the east bank) traded with local merchants (who gathered on the west bank). The Feng-yang prefect desired to build a city wall that was grand enough to honor the hometown of the dynastic founder. He paid for it by dispatching a subordinate to Cheng-yang to collect a boat tax.²⁰⁵

Besides the business tax, the Ming imposed a commercial tax on retailers, known as the shop and stall tax (*men-p'an shui*). The proceeds from this tax were sizeable only in larger cities. Some officials in the mid-Ming were willing to argue that the shop and stall tax had a negative impact on commercial activity. Censor Chu Shih-ch'ang in 1528 submitted a memorial to the Chia-ching emperor requesting that in the core prefectures of Chiang-nan – in Soochow, Sung-chiang, Ch'ang-chou and Chen-chiang in Nan Chihli, and Hangchow, Chia-hsing, and Hu-chou in Chekiang – neither shops nor commodities be dutiable. Surprisingly, the emperor agreed. It was a generous concession for Chiang-nan businessmen and observers later in the century

203 *MS*, p. 5451; Huang, "Fiscal administration during the Ming dynasty." In *Chinese government in Ming times*, ed. Charles O. Hucker (New York, 1969), pp. 74–75.

204 Chu I, ed., *Han-yang fu-chih* (1546), 3, pp. 36a–37a.

205 Huang Pien, *I-p'ung lu-cheng i'u-chi*, p. 151.

would credit the commercial prosperity of Soochow and Hangchow to this policy.²⁰⁶

The state had an impact on the commercial economy in one other capacity, and that was as a consumer. Supplying the needs of the imperial household and the court required purchasing and levying manufactured goods in great quantities. Some of these goods came from imperial workshops in the capital, to which the finest artisans were called for service. Cloisonné wine cups, for example, which were much favored by the Peking court, were uniquely produced by Muslim artisans from Yunnan who came to Peking to make them in the palace beginning in the Ching-t'ai reign (1450–56), hence the Chinese term for cloisonné, *ching-t'ai lan*.²⁰⁷ The court also ran imperial workshops outside the palace in places where artisanal specialization was already well developed, commissioning work and having it shipped by the transport service to the capital. Imperial silks came from Soochow workshops, imperial embroideries from Hangchow, paper from Hsi-shan in Kiangsi province, imperial porcelains from the town of Ching-te-chen, also in Kiangsi.

Ching-te-chen had become a major porcelain center in the Yüan dynasty, when court patronage had stimulated the development of the blue-and-white underglaze cobalt porcelains for which the imperial kiln here would become world famous in the Ming. The kiln was refounded in 1369 when the emperor required that henceforth all state ceremonial vessels had to be made of white porcelain rather than metal. White-glaze ceremonial ware became standard for the court's ritual uses. When the Yung-lo emperor was preparing to receive the head of Tibetan Buddhism in 1407, for instance, he commissioned the imperial kiln in Ching-te-chen to produce ceramic versions of Tibetan vessels in white glazes to be used on that occasion. At least drawings, and possibly wooden models, would have had to be sent to the potters when this unusual order was placed. The court also acquired large volumes of porcelains for the use of the imperial household. The blue-and-white pieces produced for the emperor's personal use were distinguished by being marked with his reign title, a practice that began in the Yüan, possibly in the 1320s. Continuing court demand for blue-and-white ware in the mid-Ming led to improvement in quality. Compared to items from the Hsüan-te era, pieces produced in the 1470s have enamels that are thinner and more transparent. Quantity was also high. The earlier records were destroyed, but partial records of imperial orders after 1528 show the court purchasing porcelain pieces by the thousands: 2,570 vessels in 1529; 3,020 bowls, 1,800 stem cups,

206 Huang Pien, *I-f'ung lu-cheng t'u-chi*, p. 204; Tan-i-tzu, *T'ien-hsia lu-ch'eng t'u-yin*, p. 373.

207 Wang Tso's commentary in the *Ko-ku yao-lun*, in *Chinese Connoisseurship: The "Ko Ku Yao Lun," The Essential Criteria of Antiquities*, trans. and ed. Percival David (London, 1971), p. 144.

and 1,340 dishes in 1536; 2,500 dishes in 1545; 16,000 blue and white dishes in 1546; 1,350 square white jars in 1548 – to mention just a few of the bigger orders.²⁰⁸

State monopolies

The Ming state's principal intervention in the commercial economy took the form of monopolies controlling aspects of the production and distribution of three commodities: salt, tea, and alum. The purpose of the significant monopolies, salt and tea, was purely to derive steady revenue: in the case of salt, by charging all consumers for this necessity; and in the case of tea, by controlling the international barter of tea for horses. In practice, as we shall see, these monopolies largely worked with, rather than against, the interests of wealthy merchants.

A monopoly on salt had been a mainstay of state revenue since at least the Han dynasty, and the Ming continued to enforce it. This was an exclusive and universal monopoly: only the state could authorize the making of salt, and only state salt was permitted to circulate. Yet it was not a state enterprise. The state oversaw salt production and supervised its distribution, but within a few years of the dynasty's founding, the actual circulation and sale of salt was contracted out to private merchants, who paid for the privilege of dealing in this overpriced and profitable commodity by purchasing salt licenses or vouchers (*yin*) from the state. These licenses permitted the holder to purchase 205 catties (120 kg) per license from state saltyards at fixed prices, then retail that salt within certain regions.²⁰⁹

The main salt yards were located along the coast, from Shantung in the north to Kwangtung in the south. In Shantung, salt was obtained through the expensive process of washing salt-saturated sand near the ocean and then shipping it inland 35 kilometers, where fuel was available, for boiling down. In the Liang-Huai region of Nan Chihli, salt was produced either by boiling seawater in copper pans or by leaving it to evaporate in the sun. The latter process was less expensive than boiling, which involved high fuel costs, but the

208 Margaret Medley, "Organization and production at Jingdezhen in the sixteenth century." In *The porcelains of Jingdezhen*, ed. Rosemary Scott (London, 1993), pp. 69–73, 82. See also the figures quoted in Michael Dillon, "Jingdezhen as a Ming industrial center," *Ming Studies*, 6 (1978), pp. 37–44, and Tsing Yuan, "The porcelain industry at Ching-te-chen 1550–1700," *Ming Studies*, 6 (1978), pp. 45–53.

209 *Nanchinghu-puchih* (1550), 14, pp. 28a–30a. The license entitled the holder to 200 catties of salt, equal to one bale (*pao*), plus 5 catties to cover wastage, known as wastage salt (*hao-yen*). At the beginning of the dynasty, when the salt was handled exclusively by government agents, a license was worth 400 catties; it was halved to 200 catties when the distribution was contracted out to private merchants. In practice, the amount of salt per *yin* varied widely; see Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 193.

former produced a higher quality of salt. Salt was also produced in the interior: from salt lakes in Shansi province,²¹⁰ and from deep-drilled salt mines in Szechwan and Yunnan.²¹¹ Although drilling was expensive, the cost was offset by savings in the considerable transport costs that would otherwise have been entailed by moving this bulky commodity inland from the coast. Since the market price of salt varied directly with the distance the salt had to be transported, the Ming divided up its monopoly, as previous dynasties had done, into a series of distinct distribution regions, corresponding roughly to provincial boundaries. This arrangement, which basically respected the natural tendency of distribution to fall within a hierarchy of regional markets, saved the state from having “to work out a uniform price structure applicable to the whole empire and to coordinate salt production accordingly,” as Ray Huang has noted.²¹² A licensing system supervised from Nanking controlled the system, and a network of censors appointed to the salt commissions in each major salt-producing region kept an eye on operations.

According to the *Collected statutes of the Ming*, the revenue from the salt monopoly was primarily to cover the costs of border defense, and secondarily to meeting such emergencies as famine relief. To strengthen the salt monopoly's primary function at a time when grain and horses were in short supply on the frontier and the state transportation infrastructure not equal to the task of moving them up to the border, the government, in 1395, adopted what was called the *k'ai-chung* or “border delivery” method. This barter arrangement, first instituted in the Sung dynasty as a means of supplying northern border posts with food, required merchants who wanted salt licenses to deliver grain, animal fodder, or horses to the frontier region. “Border delivery” was revived as a supplement to the two main early Ming policies of having soldiers grow their own food in agricultural colonies (*ping-t'un*), and requiring civilians to transport tribute grain up to the northern border. These policies proved inadequate to supplying grain at the level it was needed, and so the government transferred a portion of the burden of supply onto private entrepreneurs. Profits from the trade were such that it stimulated the circulation of grain from the abundant south to the needy north, but it was an expensive arrangement. To lower the transport costs, some *k'ai-chung* merchants bought land and set up agricultural estates in the border areas. These merchant colonies (*shang-t'un*), as they were called, could take advantage of lower land and labor costs to save the considerable expense of shipping

210 See Helen Dunstan, “The Ho-lung salt administration in Ming times,” Diss., Cambridge University, 1980.

211 Hans Ulrich Vogel, *Untersuchungen über die Salzgeschichte von Sichuan (311 V.Chr.-1911): Strukturen des Monopols und der Produktion* (Stuttgart, 1990).

212 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 190.

from the south, though this saving was offset by the lower productivity of northern land.

In theory, the *k'ai-chung* system was open to any merchant who wished to bring grain north and barter it to the government for salt licenses. In fact, though, the cost of long-distance transport, as well as the cost of moving salt, meant that only the wealthiest merchants could afford to get into the salt monopoly. In addition, the bureaucratic mechanisms that funneled the trade and inflated distribution costs meant that the capital involved in a single salt transaction could be tied up for at least two years, and sometimes as many as five or six years.²¹³ Nonetheless, for those who could afford to enter the trade, participation in the government salt monopoly was a lucrative venture. With every county given a quota of government salt that it had to buy, the salt merchants were selling on a forced market. The merchants who got involved in this trade tended to be from two areas: from southern Shansi and southwestern Shensi provinces, which was the economically most developed region close to the border; and from Hui-chou prefecture, the mountainous region south of Nanking which had no connection with the border but had been producing energetic and well-capitalized merchants since the Sung dynasty.

The twin early Ming policies of having frontier soldiers work in military agricultural colonies and civilians transport additional supplies of grain up to the border gave way in the mid-fifteenth century as civilian transport was gradually commuted to a tax payment, which the government then used to buy grain. As a result of shifting from levying labor to purchasing in kind, a large commercial market in grain emerged in the north. This commercialization process was brought to its logical conclusion in 1492, when Minister of Revenue, Yeh Ch'i (1426–1501), proposed that the border delivery (*k'ai-chung*) trade be converted to monetary payment: henceforth, salt merchants would be allowed to purchase their salt licenses directly from the government by making a payment in silver. No longer would they have to deliver grain to the border. The government would control the commutation rate and use this cash revenue to buy the food and other military supplies that it needed for its troops. Further commutation of military grain supplies from the Cheng-te era (1506–21) forward only increased the size of the market and intensified the level of capital that was needed to participate in the salt monopoly and in the profits that accrued from it. Commutation also spurred the use and circulation of silver in the private sector, silver being the medium through which the great volumes of grain going to the border was handled.

213 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 195.

Among the effects of the border delivery (*k'ai-chung*) system was a greater specialization among the merchants handling the trade, and the ascendancy of Shansi and Hui-chou natives as the two most powerful merchant groups in China. In the terminology used in Yangchow, there were the "border merchants," northern locals who provisioned the garrisons with rice, beans, and fodder and were paid in salt licenses. These licenses they then sold at discounted prices to the "interior merchants," some of whom were Shansi (as well as Shensi) merchants, others of whom were Hui-chou merchants, and both of whom thenceforth based themselves in the Yangchow region close to the official salt yards. These were the men who controlled the trade. After acquiring government salt, they sold it wholesale, at an enormous profit, to a third group, the "water-transport merchants," who made a profit by distributing the salt to local retailers.²¹⁴ By 1552 "there were several hundred ["interior"] merchants from the northwest residing in Yangchow,"²¹⁵ which served as the Chiang-nan hub for the trade.

Tea was not under the same sort of universal monopoly that kept salt entirely within state control. Rather, the tea monopoly was set up solely to regulate the sale of tea to nomadic peoples on China's northern border. This was done for the purpose of acquiring horses for the Chinese military; China found it more profitable to trade for nomad horses than raise its own. At three border trading posts in northwestern Shensi, the government set up Tea-and-Horse Trade Offices (*ch'a-ma ssu*) in 1371 to operate the trade; these were later supplemented by offices in Shensi and in Szechwan. These offices were permitted initially to trade only once every three years, and prices were set at 120 catties (70 kg) for a superior horse, 70 catties (40 kg) for an average horse, and 50 catties (30 kg) for a horse of poor quality. The tea that these offices traded for horses was supplied to them by merchants, who purchased it wholesale through the license system and transported it to the Tea-and-Horse Trade Offices.²¹⁶

Only tea grown by designated producers could enter the trade. The tea supplying this trade came from several sources. One was An-hua county, Hukuang, isolated deep in the hills west of Ch'ang-sha. The major center for the wholesale tea trade in west-central China, its tea was shipped down the Tzu River to Tung-t'ing Lake, and from there transported up to the border.

214 *Yang-chou fu-chih* (1601), 111, quoted in Chang Cheng-ming and Hsüeh Hui-lin, *Ming-Ch'ing Chin shang tz'u-liao hsiian-pien*, p. 79. The relationship between the Shansi merchants and the border merchants is discussed in Terada Takanobu, *Sansai shōnin no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1972). See the Chinese translation by Chang Cheng-ming, et al., *Shansi shang-jen yen-chiu* (T'ai-yüan, 1986), pp. 199ff.

215 Ch'eng Meng-hsing, *Yang-chou fu-chih* (1733), 32, p. 8a.

216 In early Ming, the burden of transport fell on soldiers; subsequently, it was transferred to private merchants. See Morris Rossabi, "The tea and horse trade with Inner Asia during the Ming," *Journal of Asian History* 4, No. 2 (1970), pp. 142-3.

Certain counties in Kiangsi, Szechwan, and to a lesser extent Yunnan also supplied the trade. "Tea administration officials" (*ch'a-fa kuan*) stationed in these counties monitored the purchase of official tea and made sure that the amount a merchant purchased did not exceed the maximum indicated on the licenses he had acquired. At locations downstream from where official tea was produced, the government established tea license inspection stations (*p'i-yen ch'a-yin so*) to check licenses and ensure that the trade was being conducted according to regulations. For example, the inspection station at Chiu-chiang, Kiangsi province's river port on the Yangtze, was set up in 1373 to monitor the shipment of the official tea produced in the nearby Lu Mountains. The cost of this tea was set in relation to the distance that a merchant would have to transport it to get it to the border. In 1397, the distribution of official tea in Szechwan province was centralized to warehouses in four locations, and merchants working in the tea monopoly were required to buy the tea with grain, and then move it up to the border. The tea monopoly thus allowed the government to induce the movement of grain into the less commercialized western region of China. The tea monopoly carried prohibitions against the private sale of tea across the northwest border, and these intensified through the fifteenth century to ensure an adequate supply of horses.²¹⁷ By the middle of the sixteenth century, the annual flow of tea across the border had risen to some 16 million catties (9 and a half million kg).²¹⁸

Tea grown and processed for domestic consumption (a much larger portion of China's production than the tea traded at the border) was not subject to the monopoly. Demand had encouraged the spread of tea cultivation in the Yüan and early Ming, and the tastes of tea-drinkers, now better served, were changing. Most noteworthy was the shift from powdered to leaf tea. Powdered tea was processed by milling tea leaves into powder, then compacting it into cakes that were readily transportable. This processing method was suitable for tea that had to travel long distances, as tea left in leaf form would grow stale too quickly; additionally, powdered tea was more compact to ship. As tea became a beverage more broadly consumed within society,

217 *Nanching hu-pu chih* (1550), 12, pp. 36a–39a; *TML*, 8, pp. 16b–17b. The three Tea-and-Horse Trade Offices were located in T'ao-chou (present-day Lin-r'an), Ho-chou (present-day Lin-hsia), and Hsi-ning. The four Szechwan tea warehouses were in Ch'eng-tu, Pao-ning and Ch'ung-ch'ing prefectures and Po-chou Pacification District. Regarding the cost of horses, see Huang Pien, *I-t'ung lu-cheng' u-chi*, p. 84. Regarding the Chiu-chiang inspection station, see *Chiu-chiang fu-chih* (1527), 9, p. 11b; the inspection station was closed in 1527 and its functions assumed by the inspection station in Nanking (Ying-t'ien-fu p'i-chien-so), which operated, as the Chiu-chiang station had, under the jurisdiction of the Kiangsi Office within the Ministry of Revenue. In 1440, the penalty for smuggling tea was extended to anyone involved in the trade, including the carters and boatmen who moved it and the warehouse owners or agents that facilitated it. In 1482, the penalties were increased to a severity equal to those for salt smuggling.

218 *Nanching hu-pu chih* (1550), 12, pp. 39b–40a.

however, the demand for the fresher leaf tea rose, challenging the established taste for powdered tea among the tea-drinkers of the Chiang-nan elite. The Hung-wu emperor personally preferred leaf tea and declared that it alone would suffice as tribute from those areas where tea was furnished to the court. Apparently his decision was motivated in part by his desire to disturb the patterns of corruption surrounding the levy of powdered tea.²¹⁹ Leaf-tea-producing regions like Hui-chou, which were close to the major centers of consumption in Chiang-nan, profited from this shift in taste.

The third state monopoly was in alum, which was used for tanning leather and sizing paper. This monopoly was instituted in 1370 as a special levy on two places where alum was produced in Lu-chou and An-ch'ing prefectures, and did not operate on anything like the scale of the salt or tea monopoly. State regulations permitted only officially designated kilns to produce alum and only in specified amounts. Penalties for private production and sale were the same as those stipulated for the tea monopoly.²²⁰

In addition to alum, tea, and salt, certain commodities like liquor and vinegar, which had been under monopoly in earlier dynasties, were assessed for special taxes that producers were required to pay at point of production, and merchants required to pay when they brought these commodities into cities to sell. Merchants who had not paid up taxes on restricted goods by the end of the year and officials whose level of collection fell below the previous year's, were subject to corporal punishment plus confiscation of half the goods.²²¹ Although one might gain the impression from these laws that merchants had to work under considerable restriction and pressure, the circulation of both restricted and monopolized commodities was left in the hands of merchants, not taken over by the state. Rather than seeking to suppress or control commerce, the Ming state used various licensing systems to take advantage of the work merchants did in order to attain its fiscal and policy objectives. The state's use of merchants created for them opportunities and wealth that stimulated the growth of commerce in the early Ming.

Markets

A good indicator of the growth of the Ming commercial economy is the growth of markets (*shih, chi*). The nodes of the networks through which commodities were exchanged appeared as required: as trade grew, so did the number of markets and the frequency with which they were open. Many counties had only two or three at the beginning of the Ming, almost all peri-

219 Percival David, *Chinese Connoisseurship*, p. 10.

220 TML, 8, p. 19a-b.

221 TML, 8, pp. 20a-b, 22b-23a.

odic. The longest cycle was ten days; that is, the market was held only three times a month. A five-day cycle was more common. The county seat was usually the central market of the county, and was often open permanently or on a shorter period than rural markets. Some county seats in the interior, however, did not have regular markets until the fifteenth century. Markets were officially recognized, but not usually officially financed or even supervised.

The county market operated in hierarchical relation to other markets in its prefecture, as periodicity rates attest. In Ho-chien prefecture, Pei Chihli, the market in the prefectural capital met daily, markets in the subprefectural and county seats met five or six times a month, whereas markets in the rural towns below the county seats met only two or three times a month.²²² In places where markets had become essential to the local economy, periodicity was offset by a proliferation of markets that staggered their market days through the month. For example, the markets in and around the capital of Lu-shan county, Honan, had increased by 1550 to seven within the city walls and four outside the four city gates. Of the seven inside, four met thrice monthly, two twice, and one once. Of the four outside, one met five times a month, two met three times, and one met twice. Among them, they amounted to thirty market days, so arranged that one market was open every day of the month and none competed with any other.²²³ Moving the daily market among eleven sites not only offset periodicity but increased the accessibility of the market for people in different parts of the city.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, permanency was replacing periodicity. Of the eight markets listed in the 1556 gazetteer of another Honan county, Kuang-shan, four met every day, and the rest met every other day. Both the "great market" (*ta-chi*) in the county seat and the market inside the south gate were open on a permanent, daily basis.²²⁴ Outside the county seat, permanent market towns were also forming on the sites of existing settlements. In the long list of villages in the 1506 gazetteer of Ta-ming prefecture, Pei Chihli, four towns (*chen*) are singled out as places where merchants gather. Places where trade was conducted on a permanent basis came to be distinguished by this term. For three of these towns, reasons are given: two because they were located near a major river, and one because the land there was fertile and, by implication, productivity high. That only four are identified as trading centers indicates that rural markets were still limited in this northern prefecture, and that goods produced outside these towns had to be brought there to be traded rather than moving up through a more articulated structure

222 P'an Shen, *Ho-chien fu-chih* (1540), 7, p. 4a.

223 Sun To, *Lu-shan hsien-chih* (1552), 1, p. 33a-b.

224 Wang Chia-shih, *Kuang-shan hsien-chih* (1556), 1, p. 21a-b.

of local markets. The gazetteer notes of one village that “many of the people engage in weaving,”²²⁵ for instance, suggesting that production and exchange were carried on in separate places.

Markets developed where conditions favored trade. Access to good river transportation going in many directions was always a strong asset. This is captured in a magistrate’s description of Ku-shih county, Honan, in 1469: “Ku-shih county is the meeting place between Wu [Chiang-nan] and Ch’u [Hukuang], the hub between Huai [northern Nan Chihli] and Ju [southern Honan]. People are many, goods abundant, and water and land routes cross, thereby enabling trade. The circulation of goods here benefits the people and supplies the peasants. For this reason, commodities are brought together here at markets where the people go to trade.”²²⁶

Markets did not appear naturally but had to be set up. Often they were founded by an individual or lineage with a view to drawing a place into profitable commercial networks. For instance, the gazetteer of Ch’ang-shu county in the northern part of Soochow reports that “Hsi-p’u Market in Nan-hsiang canton was founded by resident Ch’ien in the Cheng-t’ung era. Its streets were brick-paved and it was close to the Yangtze and could accommodate merchant boats.” This Ch’ien, or another member of the same lineage, built a second market at T’ien-chuang, presumably to replicate the success of the first. The account goes on to note that Hsü Family Market was founded by a Hsü, T’ang Market by a T’ang, Li Market by a Li, Ho Family Market by a Ho, and so forth.²²⁷ Occasionally, local magistrates established markets that bore their surnames,²²⁸ though the more usual founder was a local man who could draw on lineage wealth to make the necessary investments to attract trade. Through the levy of market fees and the supervision of trading, the founding lineage stood to realize a handsome profit.

Many markets specialized in handling certain items. This specialization increased as the number of markets within a county grew. In Soochow’s Wu-chiang county, for instance, farmers in the 1480s sold their vegetables at the markets at Wu-lou and P’ang-shan-ts’un, whereas fishermen marketed their catch at Ch’ung-p’u and T’un-ts’un. T’un-ts’un must have been a large market, for metalworking was also a specialty there, as it was also at T’an-ch’iu. For most of these markets, the gazetteer not only lists their clienteles,

225 T’ang Chin, *Ta-ming fu-chih* (1506), 1, pp. 31b–38a.

226 Pao Ying, *Ku-shih hsien-chih* (1659), 3, p. 4a.

227 *Ch’ang-shu hsien-chih* (1687), *chüan* 5, quoted in Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch’ing she-hui ching-chi shih lun-wen chi* (Peking, 1982), p. 235. The gazetteer does not date the founding of the other markets, which may not date earlier than the mid-Ming. Fu cites another early Ming example from Chia-ting county.

228 E.g., *Chia-ting hsien-chih* (1882), *chüan* 1, quoted in Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch’ing she-hui ching-chi shih lun-wen chi*, p. 235; Ts’ai Kuang-ch’ien, et al., *Ch’ung-chou fu-chih* (1619) rpt. in *Ch’ung-shan hsien-chih* (1917), 4, p. 102b, referring to a market founded by a subprefectural magistrate in 1515.

but names at least one major temple per market town, and occasionally as many as four; that is, these markets drew enough business so as to be able to support expensive ceremonial institutions.²²⁹

After a market had graduated from periodic to daily, the next possible stage of its development was to become a market town. This process can be traced in most Chiang-nan counties during the sixteenth century. For instance, Chia-ting county in the 1510s had nine towns and six markets. By mid-century, four of those markets had become towns and an additional town had been founded. By the end of the century, Chia-ting had four more towns and one more market. (The dynastic transition took its toll: not until the latter part of the eighteenth century would Chia-ting's urban structure re-erect itself into as ramified a network of market towns as it had been in the late sixteenth century.)²³⁰

The extraordinary growth of market towns in Chiang-nan through the mid- to late Ming took place within a regional marketing hierarchy that was becoming more elaborate. This hierarchy funneled goods and services up to regional centers – Soochow in the case of Chiang-nan – and, in doing so, stimulated the selling of products and labor in the rural markets at the bottom of the hierarchy. The Chiang-nan commercial economy at all levels grew, though the most visible beneficiary was Soochow. Soochow's emergence as the economic center of Chiang-nan could not necessarily have been anticipated in the opening years of the dynasty. It was marked for having been the base of Hung-wu's arch-rival, Chang Shih-ch'eng, in the inter-dynastic war; in addition, Hung-wu was suspicious of the city because it had been a major center of gentry-landlord power under the Mongols. At the start of his reign, the emperor tried to bring Soochow to its knees by imposing crushing taxes and forced relocations of the people and to eclipse it by investing heavily in Nanking and granting Nanking extraordinary prominence as his capital. The plan did not succeed. Because of the strength of its commercialized local economy, Soochow proved able to shoulder the tax burden the emperor placed on it. Indeed, that tax burden may have helped to further stimulate commercialization by forcing people to pursue innovative strategies for making money. The Yung-lo emperor abandoned his father's plan; by removing the primary capital to the north, he deflated Hung-wu's aspiration that Nanking should enjoy regional preeminence over Soochow.

Although the Grand Canal linked both Soochow and Nanking to Peking, the southern capital's connection to the canal was a side spur. The main artery flowed to Soochow. The reopening of the Grand Canal thus more or less

229 Mo Tan, *Wu-chiang chih* (1488), 2, pp. 10b–13a; only for two market villages are no temples listed.

230 Ch'en Hsüeh-wen, *Chung-kuo feng-chien wan-ch'i ti shang-p' in ching-chi* (Ch'ang-sha, 1989), p. 152.

ensured that the Soochow region would be the center of the Chiang-nan economy.²³¹ Nanking would remain preeminent as an administrative and cultural center, but not as a marketing center. Soochow's only other contender for commercial supremacy in the Chiang-nan region was Hangchow, but it lay that much further down the Grand Canal away from the center of the delta. Moreover, the decline of maritime trade following the Ming prohibition on travel abroad, combined with its further southward location, meant that ocean-going Hangchow could not rival landlocked Soochow, which was also a port for sea-going trading ships in Ming times.

The revival of the Grand Canal had a similar effect north of the Yangtze, as the flow of fiscal and commercial traffic through their gates brought wealth to cities such as Yang-chou and Hsü-chou in Nan Chihli, and Chi-ning and Lin-ch'ing in Shantung. The weaker commercial development of these cities' hinterlands meant that the Grand Canal was an asset even more decisive than it was for cities south of the river; at the same time, however, the weakness of the marketing systems in their hinterlands limited the impact of that influence and prevented them from rivaling the great Chiang-nan cities.

Commodities

Markets are sites at which goods are bartered, bought, or sold. Put simply, goods enter markets either as surplus or as products grown or manufactured specifically for exchange. Products of the latter type have to be sold or traded so that the producers can obtain the necessities of life; they are, in other words, commodities. The transition from trading in surplus to trading in commodities is a significant step in the development of commerce; it is also a major theme in the economic history of the Ming dynasty.

A clear example of this development toward commodity trading can be traced in the textile industry. In times (early in the dynasty) and areas where commercial development was weak, the production of textiles might be contained within the peasant household, where they were woven using raw materials that peasants had grown themselves and on machinery that belonged to the household. As commerce developed (in the mid-Ming) and goods came to be traded in greater volume and with increasing regularity, market demand began to intervene in the integration of agricultural and handicraft production within the rural household. Some peasant households that had, say, grown mulberry to feed silkworms from which they reeled raw silk and wove silk cloth, came to specialize in silk production. Rather than grow rice as well as mulberry, they concentrated exclusively on growing mulberry and

²³¹ Marmé, "Heaven on Earth," p. 30.

producing silk and went to market to buy their food. By the late Ming, some rural producers came to specialize not just in one product, but in one stage of its production. To continue with the example of silk, after having shifted the labor of the household from producing food and silk to producing only silk, some households in the late Ming specialized in silk-reeling alone, buying the cocoons and selling the silk thread to entrepreneurs who supplied it to weaving households.²³² This growing division of labor was the significant development in Ming economic life.

The commercialization of textile production – from selling surplus to producing for the market – was a mid-Ming development. In the humid Chiang-nan core, where silk of renowned quality was already being widely produced in the Southern Sung, commercialization spread early in the fifteenth century, as silk production moved from the city of Soochow where it had been concentrated down to the seats of its subordinate counties. Skyrocketing demand in the 1470s and 1480s broke the urban monopoly and turned silk production into a rural industry.²³³ A local gazetteer from the Lake T'ai region records that, at that time, “in every village near a town, residents were devoting their energies entirely to earning a living from silk. The wealthy hired others to weave, and the poor wove themselves.”²³⁴ This report indicates that commercialization around Lake T'ai had proceeded quite far: not only were peasants abandoning other spheres of production to work solely at producing silk, but the wealthy were hiring labor to take advantage of the opportunity that a fast-developing textile market was placing before them.

Much of textiles woven in the mid-Ming nonetheless remained outside production for the market. The 1543 gazetteer of Shao-wu prefecture, Fukien, observes the convention of noting the sexual division of labor between heavy work in the fields for men and lighter work at the loom for women, saying that women “engage in weaving to clothe their husbands.” Reality did not entirely conform to the classical model of the ploughing husband and the weaving wife, however, for “what is left over they then trade to make a profit.”²³⁵ This suggests that, in the Fukien interior in the 1540s, the cloth entering the market was still surplus product, not something produced as a commodity. In areas closer to the textile industry of Chiang-nan,

232 This logic is laid out in Tanaka Masatoshi, “Rural handicraft in Jiangnan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.” In *State and society in China: Japanese perspectives on Ming-Qing social and economic history*, eds. Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Tokyo, 1984), especially p. 86.

233 Marmé, “Heaven on Earth,” p. 34.

234 *Chen-ise hsien-chih* (1746), *chüan* 25, quoted in P'an Shu-chih, “Ming-tai Chekiang shih-chen fen-pu yü chieh-kou,” *Li-shih ti-li*, no. 5 (1987), p. 186.

235 *Shao-wu fu-chih* (1543), 2.45b.

the commercialization process did not go as far as in Chiang-nan perhaps, but it did influence production in these areas in terms of directing producers to specialize in certain items that could move in regional marketing networks. For instance, the silk woven in Chiu-chiang, known as “local silk” or “rough silk” (*’u ssu*), could not compete in quality with the fine silks produced down-river in Soochow, according to the prefectural gazetteer of 1527.²³⁶ Even so, silk was the second most important fabric produced in Chiu-chiang and was extensively traded. In other words, a sophisticated market dominated by high-quality silk could nonetheless draw lesser-quality silk into commercial circulation, since it, too, had its market. Under this influence, specialization was inevitable. The gazetteer notes in this vein that the women of Te-hua county “only sew and do not know how to weave.”²³⁷ In other words, the cloth that these peasant women sewed was bought on the market as a commodity, not made as an item of household production.

The organization of the cotton industry underwent the same development as silk did through the Ming, though its spread and transformation were even more dramatic. Cotton took root in south China in the Sung, spreading northward through the Yüan and early Ming, first to the Yangtze Valley, and then further north into Shantung and Shansi. The technology to produce cotton cloth soon followed the arrival of the plant. In Chiang-nan, that technology was enhanced in the Yüan through a process of borrowing practices from silk-weaving technology. The commercialization of cotton production, notably in Sung-chiang, was achieved in the latter half of the fifteenth century.²³⁸ Sung-chiang, it was claimed, “clothed the empire” by the turn of the sixteenth century. The prefecture’s location in the Chiang-nan core east of the major metropolises of Soochow, Hangchow, and Nanking placed the industry close to major points of trade and consumption. The prefecture was also favored by being located on the boundary between the provinces north of the Yangtze River, where cotton was more widely cultivated than in the south, and the provinces south, where spinning and weaving technology were better developed than in the north. More particularly, land in the eastern area of Sung-chiang was barren and hard to irrigate, making it impossible for peasants to meet their rent and tax payments trying to grow rice. Cultivators had to turn to other crops better suited to the soil, and of sufficiently high productivity to enable them to survive. Silk, flax, and ramie textile production had appeared previously as rural sideline industries else-

²³⁶ *Chiu-chiang-fu-chih* (1527), 4, p. 17a.

²³⁷ *Chiu-chiang-fu-chih* (1527), 1, p. 19b.

²³⁸ Regarding the cotton industry in Sung-chiang, see Nishijima Sadao, “The formation of the early Chinese cotton industry.” In *State and Society in China: Japanese Perspectives in Ming-Qing Social and Economic History*, eds. Linda Grove and Christian Daniels (Tokyo, 1984).

where in Chiang-nan, yielding peasant households a small surplus when they traded their textiles on the market, but none were well suited to the conditions in Sung-chiang; that role cotton would fill. It became a permanent part of Sung-chiang's tax assessment in 1433, and shortly thereafter became a common peasant sideline. The partial conversion of taxes from kind to silver, initiated by the prefect in 1486, pushed cotton further in the direction of becoming a commodity produced for sale on the market. In the northeastern part of the prefecture, cotton came to be grown on close to 90 percent of the land by the late Ming, and the network of irrigation channels previously built to feed water into the paddy fields fell into disuse, as peasants found cotton more profitable than rice. By that time, as the 1631 prefectural gazetteer would note, cotton became so well-established that "every village and market town has its own varieties and names" for the cotton cloth it produced; "the list is inexhaustible."²³⁹

The production cycle for cotton, from cultivation to cloth, was originally unified: the cotton was grown, ginned (the process by which seeds are removed), spun, and woven all within a single household. Commerce impinged in the form of sales to itinerant cloth merchants, and sometimes in the form of purchases of raw cotton to make up for shortfalls in household cultivation, but division of labor was minimal. By the mid-Ming, however, the production of cotton cloth was becoming more specialized for some producers, as described in the 1512 prefectural gazetteer: "The textile industry is not limited to the rural villages, but is also seen in the city. Old rural women enter the market at dawn carrying yarn and, after trading it for raw cotton, return home. The next morning they again leave home carrying yarn. There is not a moment of rest. The weavers finish a bolt a day, and there are some who stay awake all night."²⁴⁰ Spinners and weavers thus specialized in their parts of the production process, and their income relied entirely on the division of labor being resolved by the urban-based market. The commercial production of cotton cloth in Chiang-nan so developed that raw material had to be imported from elsewhere to keep the spinners and weavers going. Merchants shipped additional supplies of ginned cotton down the Grand Canal from Shantung and up the coast from Fukien and Kwangtung to keep the skilled spinners and weavers of Chiang-nan busy. At the same time, these merchants brought grain into Chiang-nan to feed those who were no longer growing their own food. Thus began the long-

239 Ch'en Chi-ju, et al., *Sung-chiang fu-chih* (1631), 6.10b, quoted in Nishijima, "The formation of the early Chinese cotton industry," p. 49.

240 *Sung-chiang fu-chih* (1512), 4.11a, quoted in Nishijima, "The formation of the early Chinese cotton industry," p. 55.

distance autumn trade down the Yangtze River from the rice-surplus middle Yangtze provinces of Hu-kuang and Kiangsi to consumers in Chiang-nan.

Was cotton textile production in Chiang-nan coming under greater merchant control in the late Ming? Cloth merchants had inserted themselves in the production process to the extent that they were taking advantage of the gaps in the division of labor: merchants were regularly buying ginned cotton to sell to spinners, or buying yarn to sell to weavers, or buying up the weavers' output to wholesale to cloth retailers. Chu Kuo-chen (1557–1632) has described this sort of arrangement in his native Hu-chou in northern Che-kiang. He says that cloth merchants who came from neighboring prefectures, probably the commercial textile centers of Soochow and Sung-chiang, and set up shops in Hu-chou, sold raw cotton to people who “spin it into yarn or weave it into cloth. They go to the market early in the morning, exchange [their product] for raw cotton, and then return home where they again spin or weave it, taking it back the following morning to exchange.”²⁴¹ With the process of textile-making thus broken up into separate stages, the merchants could dominate production. The spinners and weavers who worked for them thus became tied into the production process, a tie often fortified by debt to the merchants. As their entire labor time was devoted to cloth production, they were no longer peasants engaged in a sideline industry, but were approaching the status of professional spinners and weavers.

Historians aware of the process of capitalism's development in Europe have examined the late-Ming record carefully for evidence that Chinese textile workers were becoming absorbed into a putting-out system. Under the putting-out system as it developed in Europe, merchants advanced capital to workers in the form of raw materials and guaranteed them an income for their labor. Their investment capital controlled the production process, and putting-out became the precursor to the concentration of textile labor into factories. Historians of the Ming have argued on both sides of the question of whether the commercial organization of textile production in Chiang-nan can be characterized as putting-out.²⁴² In the passage from Chu Kuo-chen just quoted, the use of the term “exchange” (*i*) rather than “sell” might suggest that producers were not negotiating the sale of their products daily, but were working for a single agent who handled all stages of the process, from the buying of raw cotton to the distribution of finished cloth. One can certainly find other examples of Chiang-nan merchants combining the separate stages of textile production under their supervision; for example, cotton

²⁴¹ Chu Kuo-chen, *Yung-ch'uang hsiao-p'in*.

²⁴² Nishijima, “The formation of the early Chinese cotton industry,” pp. 63, 64, 66, 69, argues against the putting-out interpretation. Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch'ing she-hui ching-chi shih lun-wen chi*, p. 227, argues the other side.

shops in the Sung-chiang town of Feng-ching purchased raw cloth from local peasant weavers, hired dyers and calendarers in the hundreds from Nanking to finish the cloth, and then sold the final product.²⁴³ For understanding the history of capitalism, however, the important feature of putting-out is that merchants were controlling the production process on the strength of their investment capital. The putting-out merchant was not simply taking advantage of the division of labor by selling to a weaver one morning and buying his product the next, but was purchasing his labor power directly by providing raw materials and setting the pace of production. He controlled the production process from *within*. In the late Ming, merchants also came to control peasant textile production; however, they extracted their profits from *outside* the production process: that is, by buying cheap and selling dear, by monopolizing local markets in which spinners and weavers exchanged their products,²⁴⁴ and by binding producers to them through indebtedness incurred from loans advanced at usurious rates of interest. Tanaka Masatoshi, who has argued this view most cogently, insists that the distinction between the European putting-out system and the Chinese system of exchanging product for raw material should not be blurred. The latter, he points out, “cannot be regarded as a stimulus to development” (in the sense of development toward capitalism) since the Chinese system was not altering the relations of production.²⁴⁵ From this viewpoint, the commercial economy of the late Ming was something unlike the subsistence economy of the early Ming, to be sure, but it was also unlike what was emerging contemporaneously in early modern Europe.²⁴⁶

Silver

As peasants of the mid-Ming came to produce for the market, so also they came to rely on silver as the medium through which they could exchange their product for goods they did not produce themselves but had to secure as commodities. In less commercialized areas, these goods were mostly what

243 *Feng-ching hsiao-chih*, chüan 10, quoted in Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch'ing she-hui ching-chi shih lun-wen chi*, p. 227.

244 For example, the cotton merchants in the Sung-chiang town of P'u-hsieh were able to monopolize the market there. Since rural weavers had no other outlet for their cloth, the merchants could discount the purchase price by twenty percent. See *Chia-ting hsien-chih* (1881), chüan 29, quoted in Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch'ing she-hui ching-chi shih lun-wen chi*, p. 233.

245 Tanaka Masatoshi, “Rural handicraft in Jiangnan in the sixteenth and seventeenth Centuries,” p. 85; also pp. 90, 93.

246 For a different view, see Marmé, “Heaven on Earth.” Marmé cites as evidence of putting-out a passage in which Chu Yün-ming described a merchant who “superintended the capital of resident and traveling merchants, dispersing it to shuttle and loom households and gathering the [finished] bolts of cloth in order to return them to the merchants.” It is possible, however, that this merchant was using his capital in this case to control exchange rather than production.

a compiler of the Kwangtung provincial gazetteer chose to call “sundry items” (*tša-wu*), inexpensive items for personal consumption: betel-nuts, sugar, grain, oil, wax, shell jewelry, wood, incense, and rain cloaks fashioned from bamboo leaves. Not much silver was needed to sustain this sort of exchange. “Though none of these items is produced in the local area, not one of them commands a very high price.”²⁴⁷

In more fully commercialized areas such as Chiang-nan, peasants who had turned the bulk of their production to the market needed more basic items, especially the rice which they were themselves no longer growing but which they needed both to eat and to supply in tribute to the state. Their reliance on exchange, and on silver as its medium, was much greater. A memorialist from Chia-ting county describes the economic life of cotton producers there in 1593 in terms of a series of four steps: “weaving raw cotton into cloth, exchanging cloth for silver, using silver to buy rice, and giving rice to the soldiers to transport” as grain tribute to the capital. With all necessities of life available to them through exchange, the cotton-producers of Chia-ting had no need to devote any of the labor time to producing anything other than cotton cloth. “A family’s rent, food, clothing, utensils, and what it spends for social occasions, for raising children, or for burying the dead – all come from cotton.”²⁴⁸

As the principal medium of commercial exchange, silver came to represent the power of commerce, and it penetrated wherever commercialization reached. Conversely, in isolated villages along the Fukien coast, according to a gazetteer of 1530, the people “have everything they need for their livelihood without having to fish, brew salt, or engage in commerce.” Accordingly, “there is little silver in these villages.” When the people hold their periodic religious festivals, they raise only “copper cash and rice” to pay for the costs.²⁴⁹ Until the villagers were producing commodities, silver would not flow in, nor could any but the most rudimentary commercial exchange become established: their economy remained an economy of copper coins and rice.

State policy cooperated in the growing importance of silver by commuting some tax levies, both in kind or in labor, into silver payments. The conversion began with the introduction of Gold Floral Silver in 1436, when 4.05 million piculs of tax grain from seven southern provinces was commuted at a rate of 0.25 tael per picul. Intended to facilitate tax transmittance from counties where transportation was difficult, it quickly spread throughout the region.²⁵⁰

247 *Kwangtung t'ung-chib* (1561), quoted in Li Hsi and Ts'ai Fan, *Ch'iung-shan hsien-chib* (1917), 2, p. 16b.

248 *Chia-ting hsien-chib* (1605) *chüan* quoted in Ch'en Hsüeh-wen, *Chung-kuo feng-chien wan-ch'i*, p. 154.

249 Chang Yüeh, *Hui-an hsien-chib* (1530), 4, pp. 1b, 3a.

250 Huang, *Taxation and governmental finance*, p. 52.

This reform in turn spread to almost every other item on the local tax schedules. The instant success of the Gold Floral Silver arrangement was only possible in an environment in which many economic transactions were already being conducted through money rather than barter and in which silver was available in sufficient quantities to meet the tax. Even if no new supplies of specie had been entering the economy, the monetization of tax payments on its own would have increased the velocity of circulation and thus further stimulated production for the market.

Silver was already entering China via illegal trade with Japan during the middle decades of the sixteenth century, but it was from the 1570s onward that foreign bullion began to flow into China in increasing volume. The proximate cause was the Spanish conquest of the Philippines in the late 1560s and early 1570s. With a trading base at Manila, Spanish merchants began to ship South American silver by trans-Pacific sea routes from Acapulco to pay for Chinese goods brought to the Philippines by Chinese traders from Fukien and Kwangtung. They did so on such an unprecedented scale that the volume of silver in commercial circulation grew and began to have a cumulative impact on sectors of the Chinese economy. As silver became more readily available and cheaper (in relation to copper, the other medium of exchange), the state was better able to proceed with further monetization of its tax levies through the single-whip reforms. The increase in precious metal stocks, combined with the monetization of the tax system, gave the economy an inflationary boost and, to a considerable extent, may have financed the commercial boom of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.²⁵¹

The growing reliance on silver meant that the character of exchange was altered. Producers no longer traded on the principle of barter (exchanging things of similar values) but through price (buying and selling things of different values). The inevitable instability of prices that resulted from this shift introduced volatility into economic life. Prices fluctuated according to supply, demand, hoarding, and the ever-changing bimetallic exchange rate between silver and copper. Chu Kuo-ch'en, a native of rural Hangchow, noted that, within a single day, mulberry prices could fluctuate between the morning and noon markets, and between the noon and evening markets, and do this so wildly that, as the locals put it, "even a sage would find it difficult to anticipate" what the price of leaves might be.²⁵² Small producers tended to be more vulnerable to this instability than wholesale merchants,

251 William Atwell, "International bullion flows and the Chinese economy circa 1530-1650," *Past and present*, 95 (1982), pp. 68-90, and Chapter 8 in this volume.

252 Chu Kuo-ch'en *Yung-ch'uanghsiao-p'in* (1622), *chüan* 2, quoted in P'an Shu-chih, "Ming-tai Chekiang shih-ch'en fen-pu yü chieh-kou," p. 187.

who could better afford to wait and buy when the price was low and sell when it was high.

Maritime trade

Maritime trade, operating under the stigma of piracy, had a major impact on the growth of the mid- to late Ming commercial economy. Not only did it bring silver into the country, but it stimulated the production of certain commodities that were in demand outside China. It also made many merchants living along the southeast coast extraordinarily wealthy. The risks were high, as Ch'oe Pu was told when he visited Hangchow, but the profits so great that, according to one Fukien gazetteer editor, merchants were willing to run the risk of sailing into typhoons and capsizing in order to realize them.²⁵³

Maritime trade was politically sensitive because it involved contact with foreigners, which only authorized officials were permitted to have. Because it was restricted, it was also sensitive in fiscal terms, since maritime merchants usually engaged in trade without paying commercial taxes or import duties. The *Ming code* required ocean-going vessels to report their cargo and pay tax at the places they moored along the coast. The penalty for failing to do so, as well as for under-reporting, was severe: 100 strokes of the heavy bamboo, plus confiscation of the entire cargo. Local merchants or brokers dealing with a ship were equally responsible for seeing that the cargo was reported, for they could be penalized to an equal degree for buying or warehousing cargoes not certified by the local official. According to a commentary in the code, the penalty was higher than for regular commercial tax evasion, originally because the profits from maritime commerce were high and, later, because the state wished to stop illegal trading with foreign countries. Foreign trade that was legal was restricted to certain times, places, and commodities. Foreign emissaries coming to Peking to present tribute were permitted five days' trading in the capital, were not permitted to buy weapons or metal goods, and could trade only with officially designated merchants.²⁵⁴ "Should a shopkeeper or itinerant merchant or other person enter into communication with a foreigner and engage in trade, their goods shall be confiscated and the guilty wear the cangue for one month."²⁵⁵

These penalties dissuaded almost no one living along the harbor-studded southeast coast from getting into the business of foreign trade, much to the dismay of some. In the biography of an official from the Fukien port city of Chang-chou, we read that, during a visit home while on his way to a post in

253 Lin K'uei and Li K'ai, *Lung-hsi hsien-chih* (1534), 1, p. 26b.

254 *TML*, 10, pp. 5b-6a. 255 *TML*, 17, p. 15a.

Kwangtung in 1506, he learned that his kinsmen had built a large boat, which they intended to use to carry on trade with foreigners. "I should report you to the authorities," he stormed, knowing that an interdiction against private foreign trade was in effect.²⁵⁶ The report was never made; the threat was sufficient to put an end to the venture. This difference of opinion between the Confucian official and his commercially minded magnates demonstrates the degree to which the growth of the commercial economy in the mid-Ming was creating a contradiction with the established policies of seclusion and border closure: policies that were inhibiting the development of overseas commerce.

As already noted, Ch'iu Chün, as early as 1487, argued in favor not only of removing the ban on maritime trading, but of offering a three-year moratorium on the levy of customs duties to stimulate that trade. Later officials who advocated the same course invariably cited Ch'iu as an authority on the question.²⁵⁷ The response of the Chinese court to the demand for greater trade, however, particularly with the Japanese, was to shut the limited legal foreign trade that had been carried out through Ning-po in 1523. The interdiction only increased the pressure for trade, which became so great that traders eager to handle international trade, but blocked from doing so, engaged in aggressive tactics – "piracy" – to secure commercial opportunities. Out of this situation developed what became known, somewhat erroneously, as the *wo-k'ou* ("Japanese bandit") scourge of the 1540s and 1550s, as the Chinese and Japanese sailors working the coast moved from trading to raiding.²⁵⁸

Maritime trade flourished in the mid-Ming in spite of government bans. Indirect evidence of this is the survival and circulation of coastal maps and rutters. As the need for such reference works grew steadily through the sixteenth century, a member of a commercial family from Chang-chou produced China's first printed rutter in 1537. *Tu-hai fang-ch'eng* (*Route for crossing the ocean*) was based on a Cheng Ho source, as well as another text detailing the coastal route from the Yangtze River north to Liao-tung. The compiler, an idiosyncratic scholar named Wu P'u, was an associate of the powerful merchant-official, Lin Hsi-yüan (ca. 1480–ca. 1560), whose defiance of the prohibition on maritime trade and whose wealth derived from that trade were equally legendary. The publication of the rutter may be seen as a component of the strategy, associated with Lin Hsi-yüan, among powerful coastal families of pressing for a less defensive border policy and for an opening of

256 Lin K'uei and Li K'ai, *Lung-hsi hsien-chih* (1534), 8, p. 36a.

257 DMB, p. 251.

258 The *wo-k'ou* piracy is examined in detail in Kwan-wai So, *Japanese piracy in Ming China during the 16th century* (Ann Arbor, 1975).

maritime trade. *Route for crossing the ocean* continued to be used, copied, and modified by Fukien navigators into the Ch'ing dynasty.²⁵⁹

The lifting of the partial ban on maritime trade in 1567 was a major boon to the regional economies of the southeast as textiles, porcelain, and lacquerware were shipped in large quantities to Nagasaki for sale in Japan and to Manila for transshipment worldwide. Antonio de Morga, president of the audiencia at Manila at that time, describes the silks and other fabrics that Chinese merchants traded internationally through Manila: "Raw silk in bundles, of the fineness of two strands, and other silk of coarser quality; fine untwisted silk, white and of all colors, wound in small skeins; quantities of velvets, some plain and some embroidered in all sorts of figures, colors and fashions, others with body of gold and embroidered with gold; woven stuffs and brocades, of gold and silver upon silk of various colors and patterns; quantities of gold and silver thread in skeins; damasks, satins, taffetas, and other cloths of all colors; linen made from grass, called *lençesuelo*; and white cotton cloth of different kinds and quantities."

Textiles were only the most important items of the large range of goods that Chinese merchants brought out of the domestic market. "They also brought musk, benzoin, and ivory; many bed ornaments, hangings, coverlets, and tapestries of embroidered velvet; damask and gorvaran tapestries of different shades; tablecloths, cushions, and carpets; horse-trappings of the same stuffs, and embroidered with glass beads and seed-pearls; also pearls and rubies, sapphires and crystal; metal basins, copper kettles and other copper and cast-iron pots; quantities of all sorts of nails, sheet-iron, tin and lead; and saltpetre and gunpowder."

De Morga continues his inventory of Chinese trade goods in Manila with an even longer list of processed foods and other supplies brought to support the Spanish settlement in Manila: "wheat flour; preserves made of orange, peach, pear, nutmeg and ginger, and other fruits of China; salt pork and other salt meats; live fowl of good breed and many fine capons; quantities of fresh fruits and oranges of all kinds; excellent chestnuts, walnuts, and *chicmeyes* (both green and dried, a delicious fruit); quantities of fine thread of all kinds, needles and knick-knacks; little boxes and writing cases; beds, tables, chairs, and gilded benches, painted in many figures and patterns. They bring domestic buffaloes; geese that resemble swans; horses, some mules and asses;

259 What appears to be a handwritten copy acquired by a Jesuit missionary was presented to Archbishop Laud in 1639 and deposited in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. T'ien Ju-k'ang, "*Tu-hai fang-ch'eng*," notes by way of comparison that the first printed European rutter appeared in the first decade of the sixteenth century, and was published in English in 1527. Regarding Lin Hsi-yüan, see the biography by Bodo Wiethoff in *DMB*, especially pp. 921–22. Ku Yen-wu included *Tu-hai fang-ch'eng* compass bearings to Japan in *Ku Yen-wu, T'ien-hsia chün-kuo li-ping shu* (1662), rpt in *Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an san pien shih pu* (Shanghai, 1936; rpt. Kyoto, 1975; rpt. Taipei, 1979), 34, pp. 59a–60b.

even caged birds, some of which talk, while others sing, and they make them play innumerable tricks. The Chinese furnish numberless other gewgaws and ornaments of little value and worth, which are esteemed among the Spaniards; fine crockery of all kinds; *canganes*, or cloth of Kaga, and black and blue robes; *tacley*, which are beds of all kinds; strings of cornelians and other beads, and precious stones of all colors; pepper and other spices.”

Morga closes his list with the generic category of “rarities, which, did I refer to them all, I would never finish, nor have sufficient paper for it.”²⁶⁰ The paper on which he wrote this also came from China.

Chinese merchants were successful in this trade not just because they handled goods in demand, but because they learned quickly to adapt their merchandise to foreign specifications, including design. Adaptation to Spanish tastes in design allowed Chinese silks to dominate the world silk market by the turn of the seventeenth century. Similarly, the porcelain makers of Ching-te-chen, especially as imperial orders declined after 1620, turned to producing porcelains in Japanese and European styles. One can see this design adaptation in surface decoration as early as the Chia-ching era, when aristocratic families in Europe were able to place orders for porcelains bearing their coats of arms.²⁶¹ By the Wan-li era, Chinese porcelain-makers were imitating not just images, but shapes.²⁶² In the last decades of the dynasty, Ming potters were producing both the sets of small dishes used in Japanese meals as well as the wide, shallow plates that Europeans used to serve food at table – neither of which had a place in the context of Chinese dining. The potters decorated the surfaces of these foreign shapes with Chinese designs, though sometimes the designs seem consciously “oriental” in the sense of aiming to invoke a deliberately foreign world to the European eye. The rim of one European dinner dish in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, for instance, has been painted with four figures representing the four categories of gentry, peasant, artisan, and merchant.²⁶³ This motif, as we shall note in the following section, was already hopelessly antiquated by the late Ming, and would never have appeared on a Chinese dish. Ching-te-chen potters were particularly skilled in this adaptive work. Their distinctive under-

260 Quoted in William Schurz, *The Manila galleon* (1939; rpt., New York, 1959), pp. 73–74. An account of trade goods in Manila written in 1663 by the Jesuit Colin confirms the preeminence of textiles and embroideries among Chinese products, but adds porcelain, which is noticeably absent from Morga's list of goods bound for international trade. He mentions it only as something brought to supply the Spanish community, not to trade: see Schurz, *The Manila galleon*, p. 50.

261 The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has a ewer of the Chia-ching era on which has been painted a European coat of arms, probably that of the Peixoto family of Portugal (C.222–1931).

262 The Victoria and Albert Museum has an underglaze blue salt dish of the Wan-li era made in the form of an English silver standing salt of about 1580 (C.566–1910).

263 Victoria and Albert Museum, C.457–1918.

glaze blue came to define “china” in the European market of the seventeenth century.

For the successful, the profits to be had from maritime trade were considerable. Raw silk could be sold in Japan in 1600 for close to double its Chinese price, cotton thread for two-and-a-half times, and high-quality silk fabric for almost three times. Pottery fetched two to three times the price paid in Kwangchow, and liquorice tripled in value in Japan.²⁶⁴

Merchants in Ming society

Ming China was the product of a culture that conceptualized (and to some extent tried to legislate) itself in terms of an ancient ideal of agrarian communities unified positively by imperial rule and linked minimally by commercial exchange. This conceptualization had, however, to do battle with the commercial reality that was with ever greater speed engulfing all facets of social life; and in doing battle, to modify itself. It was merchants mostly who waged this battle, and they were able to do so because they inhabited a culture that was predisposed to denigrating trade and yet at the same time honored wealth and permitted the wealthy to move, without undue haste, into elite life. Reviewing the changes in the positions that merchants occupied in Ming society furnishes a convenient way of noting the character and breadth of the social impact that commerce had on China in this age.

The first modification in Chinese thinking about commerce that occurred in the Ming was to adjust the hierarchy of occupational estates that the Ming inherited from the pre-imperial period: of gentry (*shih*) over peasantry (*nung*) over artisanate (*kung*), and all of which were above merchants (*shang*). One can find the Hung-wu emperor invoking this formula, but with prescriptive intent – more as a collective phrase to mean all subjects of his realm.²⁶⁵ The formula began to be used in the middle of the dynasty in a more anxious fashion, sometimes with a quiet warning about how things everywhere should be, but no longer were. Thus, the 1506 gazetteer of Ta-ming, Pei Chihli, says of the prefectural capital that “the gentry know to orient themselves to study, the peasantry know to devote themselves to agriculture, and the merchants, while adept at trading, do not go beyond their station.” Phrases such as this go back two thousand years in Chinese statecraft writing: their revival must indicate that conventions regarding occupational distinctions were being flouted, and that the gentry elite felt moved to admonish

264 C. R. Boxer, *The great ship from Amacon: Annals of Macao and the old Japan trade* (Lisbon, 1959), pp. 179–81.

265 See, for example, Pao Ying, *Ku-shih hsien-chih* (1659), 8, p. 12a, citing an imperial regulation of 1372.

those who did so, especially merchants elsewhere who were going beyond their station. Rather than state his objection actively, the compiler registers his indignation regarding the challenge to the traditional structure of occupations that merchants were mounting by praising its absence in this place.²⁶⁶ Increasingly through the sixteenth century, gazetteer compilers elsewhere make similar pronouncements on the four orders within their districts. Wherever possible they like to be able to praise the devotion of their scholars to study and of their peasants to agriculture, and the reluctance of either to go into trade; but security in these comments comes to be undercut by comments to the effect that “nowadays some of these characteristics are gradually changing.”²⁶⁷

By the latter decades of the sixteenth century, quiet comments about changing customs were giving way to open acknowledgement that the fourfold hierarchy had collapsed. Some gentry scholars were willing to accept that, as the scholar Kuei Yu-kuang (1507–71) put it, “in ancient times the four orders of commoners had their distinct functions, but in later times the status distinctions among scholars, peasants, and merchants have become blurred.”²⁶⁸ Others found this blurring a matter of profound distress, evidence of the hopeless degeneration of the age. Implicitly, both positions recognized that wealthy merchants in the late Ming were able to enter polite society to an extent not possible earlier and, as well, that gentry families were increasingly involved in commercial matters. Indeed, many a family able to enter the gentry as that class expanded in the sixteenth century looked back to commercial success as the financial basis upon which it was able to launch sons onto the ladder of bureaucratic success. Commercial wealth was funding access to gentry status.

The presence of commerce in elite life was strong enough by the late Ming that the inherited prejudice against merchants expressed in their traditional placement at the bottom of the social hierarchy could not be sustained. The relationship between merchants and gentry was not drained of tension, however. The gentry resisted the incursion of merchants into their realm and constructed social barriers that were effective in excluding merchants from participating in gentry networks. These barriers would not be removed until the eighteenth century. To the end of the Ming, few merchants could hope to achieve social parity with the gentry, but many were able to resist the sartorial rules that served to set them apart.²⁶⁹ The merchants who were

266 T'ang Chin, *Ta-ming-fu-chih* (1506), 1, p. 21a.

267 Sun To, *Lü-shan-hsien-chih* (1552), 1, p. 38b.

268 Cited in Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the population of China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 73.

269 Angela Hsi, “The social and economic status of the merchant class in the Ming dynasty” (Diss., University of Illinois, 1972).

best poised to enter the world of the gentry from the mid-Ming onward were the wealthy Hui-chou merchants who settled in Yang-chou and conducted the salt trade. Such merchants had to work hard to develop cordial ties with officials, both to limit the danger of bureaucratic predation and to have support in case of conflicts with other merchants. When Hui-chou salt merchant, Fan Yen-fu (1448–1517), chose, in the mid-1490s, to retire from Yang-chou, he was presented with a collection of writings by several regional officials and scholars, including the influential Censor-in-Chief, Liu Ta-hsia (1437–1516) and Censor Tai Shan (1437–1506).²⁷⁰ These gifts signal the close relationship that a man like Fan had to have with leading lights in the regional bureaucracy in order to pursue his business successfully.

Merchants who did not enjoy this sort of access to the bureaucratic world were not entirely disadvantaged, for it was possible to make the transition from commerce to gentility in other ways. There were two strategies. One was the gradual strategy of accepting inferior status temporarily on the understanding that the family, in time, would foster a degree-holder, whose success would redound to the family's credit and wash away the stigma of trade. Evidence of this strategy is a plot device that men who came from commercial and manufacturing backgrounds commonly used in writing family histories or personal biographies. This device might be called "the initiating moment." It takes place in the context of hardship, often occurs in an unexpected and sometimes mysterious way, and signals a turning point, often from agriculture to commerce, invariably from poverty to worldly success. Because the initiating moment marks the point of transition to a commercial life, it is a troubling link in a narrative of success that conforms to Confucian expectations for moral action. Chang Han (1511–93), who rose from a Hangchow textile family to ministerial position, locates the initiating moment in the time of his great-grandfather, a small-time distiller whose liquor was destroyed in a flood. "One evening as he was returning home, someone suddenly called him from behind. My great-grandfather turned to greet the man, and was handed something warm. Suddenly the person was not to be seen. When he got home, he lit the lamp and shone it on what turned out to be a small ingot of silver."²⁷¹ This, then, became the great-grandfather's capital for entering the weaving business. This initial investment that pivoted the family to fortune is thus represented in terms of a mysterious, even divine,

270 Zurndorfer, *Change and continuity in Chinese local history*, p. 100. Still the classic study of the Hui-chou (or Hsin-an) merchants in economic and cultural terms is Fujii Hiroshi, "Shinan shōnin no kenkyū," *Tōyō gakuho*, 36, No. 1 (June, 1953), pp. 1–44; 36, No. 2 (September 1953), pp. 32–60; 36, No. 3 (December 1953), pp. 65–118; and 36, No. 4 (March, 1954), pp. 115–45.

271 Quoted in Timothy Brook, "The merchant network in sixteenth century China: a discussion and translation of Chang Han's 'On Merchants,'" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 24, No. 2 (May 1981), p. 173.

intervention. The means by which the original accumulation was made – speculation, manipulation of prices, unfair trading practices – is conveniently left unexposed.

For Wang Tao-k'un (1525–93), the prominent late-Ming scholar from a Hui-chou merchant background, the initiating moment in his family's history occurred in his grandfather's time: "For generations our family had been in farming. But after my grandmother persuaded my grandfather to change to trade because merchants who went to Wen-chou and Ch'u-chou usually made a fortune, she was able to obtain capital for him and grandfather was able to become wealthy."²⁷² Rather than obscure the original act of capital accumulation behind a mystery, as Chang Han did, Wang Tao-k'un stages it as an occasion to honor his grandmother for bringing her husband a dowry that enabled him to succeed in business. The transition to commerce is thus represented as an act of praiseworthy wifely devotion, and therefore not a deviation from Confucian values. Though some gentry autobiographers may have been compelled to present their family's history as being free of any tinge that wealth had been acquired through immoral means, gentlemen in the late Ming could write about their commercial family backgrounds without evasion. One did not have to be, nor pretend to be, from the old idealized rural gentry – who, in any case, were fast disappearing as such, as the wealthier abandoned their rural manors in the late Ming and used the profits of commercial landowning to acquire urban residences, usually in the county or prefectural seat, but if possible at the provincial capital.²⁷³ Commerce of itself was no longer a base occupation.

The other, more aggressive, strategy that merchants could use to step over the boundary between themselves and the gentry was to engage in the sorts of cultural display by which the gentry paraded their power in local society. They could lay out lavish gardens, build ten-thousand-*chüan* libraries, acquire rare Sung editions, exhibit T'ang paintings, collect Shang bronzes, patronize the finest contemporary artists, and hire the best writers to compose texts for themselves. Wang Tao-k'un himself was available for professional assignments of this sort. By engaging in cultural projects on a grand and lavish scale, these merchants could outdo the gentry and thus oblige the gentry to take notice. Wealthy Hui-chou merchants were again among the participants in this cultural world. Thus it is that the genealogical records of a Fan lineage of Hui-chou presents tea-trader Fan Chi-tsung (1412–61) as an accomplished

272 Wang Tao-k'un, *T'ai-han fu-mo*, 14.14b, quoted in Zurndorfer, *Change and continuity in Chinese local history*, p. 48.

273 Timothy Brook, "Family continuity and cultural hegemony: the gentry of Ningbo, 1368–1911." In *Chinese local elites and patterns of dominance*, eds. Joseph Esherick and Mary Rankin (Stanford, 1990), p. 40.

player on the *ch'in* and his cousin, the large grain merchant, Fan Yü-ch'ing (1402–64), composing poetry in his later years – hobbies distinctly of gentry type. Another Hui-chou merchant, Pao Sung (1467–1517), built up a collection of rare books numbering over ten thousand *chüan*, some of which he had printed with his commentaries.²⁷⁴ These undertakings signaled a commitment to a broad cultural program that was, only in part, linked to a strategy designed to nurture candidates for bureaucratic office. Acquiring degrees was, in any case, less important than ensuring that the family continue to prosper in its business enterprises. Mid-Ming culture was well aware of the fragility of preserving commercial wealth over successive generations. The children of merchants “who are content with their station,” notes the Kwangtung provincial gazetteer at mid-century, “just consume their wealth and pay no further attention to the cost of living, while the extravagant and wasteful ones get up to all manner of licentious and drunken behavior, gathering together and throwing dice. Accordingly, few are able to pass on [the family fortune] to the next generation.”²⁷⁵ As it happens, the Fans maintained their family's fortune, but were notably unsuccessful in fielding examination candidates, though not for want of trying. At any rate, for the Ming merchant, there could be no advantage to culturally isolating one's family from the world of the gentry, and much in striving to lower the status barrier between commerce and gentility.

Merchants who did not command this kind of wealth, nor aspire to field a younger family member in the examination system, nonetheless sought to relieve the pressure that gentry culture placed on them as an inferior status group by constructing a discourse that equated the husbanding of economic value with the nurturing of moral value. To put it simply, late-Ming merchants worked to conceptualize commerce as a Confucian way of life.²⁷⁶ This was a difficult project, inasmuch as the available tradition had long before inserted the fourfold status hierarchy into the body of Confucian attitudes. But in the moral guides for merchants that first appeared in print early in the seventeenth century, one can see this project underway. These texts were composed as guides to effective practices – both business and personal (their authors made no distinction between these) – in the world of

274 Zurndorfer, *Change and continuity in Chinese local history*, pp. 52, 96–97.

275 *Kwangtung t'ung-chih* (1561), quoted in Li Hsi and Ts'ai Fan, *Ch'ing-shan hsien-chih* (1971), 2, p. 17a.

276 The relevance of Confucian values to commercial success is argued in Yü Ying-shih, *Chung-kuo chin-shih tsung-chiao lun-li yü shang-jen ching-shen* (T'ai-pei, 1987). For a different interpretation, which regards the application of Confucianism to mercantile values as ideologically forced, see Timothy Brook, “Commercial economy and cultural doubt in China.” In *Economy and culture in eastern Asia*, ed. Timothy Brook and Hy Van Luong. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. Middle-merchant ideology, which sought to embrace a reformed Confucianism, is explored in Richard Lufrano, “The world of the ordinary merchant: self-cultivation and commercial success in late imperial China,” (forthcoming).

commerce and finance. One of these, “*Shang-ku hsing-mi*” (*Bringing merchants to their senses*), appears as an appendix to a 1635 commercial route book. This may have been the first time it was published. Its author may be Li Chin-te, the editor of the book; for the sake of narrative convenience, we shall attribute it to Li.

Bringing merchants to their senses is a series of short maxims, a few characters or phrases in length, followed by somewhat longer commentaries. The maxims are (possibly old) merchant sayings, the commentaries a more contemporary set of statements expounding the author’s vision of the proper conduct of commercial life. The dominant theme running through the book is that it is more important to uphold morality than it is to pursue profit. This Confucian theme, anchored to Mencius, was turned to commercial purpose by the equally strong attitude in the commentaries that the only way to ensure stable, long-term profit is through honesty, not deceit. The immoral businessman who sinks to corrupt schemes will ultimately fail in his enterprise, however successful he may be in defrauding those around him. In this commercial adaptation of Confucian morality, profit was morally unreprehensible so long as it was garnered through honest means and remained within an acceptable range. For instance, it was acceptable, according to the author, to offer commercial and personal loans at a rate of 20–30 percent, on the grounds that this was within the normal interest range and would not be viewed with resentment. Circumstances might make it possible to charge 70–80 percent, but not on a long-term basis. Anyone who made loans at a rate that public opinion condemned would find his borrowers defaulting and his capital disappearing.²⁷⁷ Better to turn down the possibility of high profit in the short term in favor of moderate profit in the long term.

Another important element of Li Chin-te’s moral advice regarding the conduct of profitable business is the simple wisdom of ensuring that expenses should not exceed income. This outcome, he says, may be accomplished in three ways. One is to be diligent: attend to the smallest details, exercise caution in all business dealings, and be early to bed and early to rise. The second is to conserve the wealth you have: watch against waste, avoid ostentation, make do with what you have, and do not associate with people who waste their money on sex and gambling. If you are careful in these ways, then wealth will do what it is naturally supposed to do: beget more wealth. The third thing to do is to keep careful accounts. “Measure income in order to keep control over expenses, and to the end of your life you will never lose your wealth. If you fail to budget, you will certainly have a shortfall.”²⁷⁸

277 Li Chin-te, *K’o-shang-i-lan hsing-mi* (1635; rpt. T’ai-yüan, 1992), p. 311.

278 Li Chin-te, *K’o-shang-i-lan hsing-mi*, pp. 293, 325.

All of this advice tallies nicely with Confucian concerns about diligence and modesty and the careful calculation of meritorious conduct, translated into the commercial sphere. Like Confucianism's promise of success to the meritorious,²⁷⁹ Li's commercial morality insisted that the merchant who conducted his life in these moral ways would be rewarded with worldly success. By situating the merchant's undertakings favorably within a framework predisposed to honoring vigilance and devotion to duty, the new commercial Confucianism was able to take account of the substantial change in the constitution of Chinese society that commerce had brought about in the Ming, while at the same time involving the merchant in the moral progress that Ming Confucian self-cultivation sought to establish as the model for attaining both truth and right action. In other words, the core philosophy of the age was being molded to accept commerce in a way that previously had not been thought possible.

Finding themselves under siege by a status-seeking class of wealthy merchants, established gentry families of the late Ming responded by raising cultural barriers to the newly arrived and merely moneyed. Rather than concede ideological ground, as the merchants' client-authors hoped they might, the gentry elite defended their sense of privilege by constantly upping the standards that a would-be gentleman had to meet to cross the threshold into true cultivation. These were not standards defined solely in terms of the capability to afford them. That strategy worked only in a world in which wealth and status coincided, and in the late Ming, they did not. Rather, the standards that the elite imposed were learned marks of good breeding that one had to command before gaining access to elite society. Without a full knowledge of how to conduct rites, engage in refined conversation, compose poems, discuss the philosophers, or appreciate fine objects and works of art, one was blocked. Without access to the social circles within which such skills and tastes were developed, one was even further at a loss to break into high society.²⁸⁰ Money meant little, and the reformulations of Confucianism that were being proposed even less.

Even so, wealthy merchants demanded entry into these circles, and the power of their burgeoning wealth, strategically invested in certain art forms and in supporting certain scholars, made their exclusion increasingly difficult to sustain. The anxiety that the pressure to breach cultural barriers generated can be detected in the world of commodities. To own something prohibitively expensive (a gem from Yunnan, for example, or a lacquered vase

279 Regarding the Ming Confucian reworking of the concept of rewarded merit, see Cynthia Brokaw, *The ledgers of merit and demerit: social change and moral order in late imperial China* (Princeton, 1991).

280 Brook, "Family continuity and cultural hegemony," pp. 37–42.

from Japan) was a way of publicizing one's wealth, and the busy commercial economy of the late Ming made such objects available to those who cared to buy them. To know how to handle, appreciate, and discuss expensive artifacts endowed with cultural resonance (a painting by the great Yüan artist, Huang Kung-wang, for instance) was how one publicized his status as a man of culture and refinement. The challenge to merchants was to move from the first to the second type of relationship to cultural commodities. It was not enough simply to own an expensive commodity; one had to know how to deploy and present that object in social settings in order to obtain the status benefits that ownership was intended to achieve. Accordingly, there grew up from the middle of the sixteenth century forward a literature on collecting and appreciating such objects. The volume of writing about things in the late Ming "was unprecedented and points to a heightened awareness of the production and consumption of luxury goods as an arena for potential social conflict, if not correctly handled."²⁸¹

The texts of connoisseurship available on the book market in the late Ming, ironically perhaps, served both sides of the cultural barrier between gentry and merchants. They set what highly educated gentlemen of the age felt were the appropriate standards by which luxury goods should be consumed. But they also commoditized the knowledge that was needed to participate in this rarefied realm of cultural exchange. Any literate person could now know how to be a refined gentleman – what to collect, how to handle it, where to put it, what to avoid having on display – simply by reading these books. The appreciation for rare cultural objects in the late Ming can thus be viewed, in part, as a euphemization of wealth, for the objects in question were vessels of high commercial value before they were embodiments of high cultural value. The irony is that these cultural artifacts were usually rare objects that required great wealth to collect. The commercial reality underlying the collection and display of things does not deny their cultural value, but it does determine the context through which cultural value was assigned. The enterprise of connoisseurship favored those rich enough to be able to own them. From this perspective, the enthusiasm for writing and reading about things testifies to the impact that commerce was having on the upper reaches of late Ming society. The poor scholar could still redeem himself socially by deploying the knowledge of things that was essential for valorizing them in cultural terms, and accordingly he was in demand at gatherings in the garden of the wealthy merchant. But it was the wealthy merchant who owned the things on which he expounded.

281 Craig Clunas, *Superfluous things: material culture and social status in early modern China* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 8.

Despite the heightened power of money in the late Ming, gentry values and standards continued to dominate high society. It was simply not possible to convert wealth into status without the mediating power of taste, the definition of which merchants could influence but could not control. That had to be learned from the gentry. So long as the gentry could find ways to tap the wealth of the commercial economy, and so long as the state continued to select its servants through examinations rather than financial contributions, the gentry would remain dominant. The ladder of status and the values attached to it underwent adjustments that make the late Ming different from the world ordered by the Hung-wu emperor, yet the continuities between the fourteenth century and the seventeenth argue in favor of looking back at the Ming and seeing it as Chinese of the following dynasty did; as a changing, but nonetheless coherent link in the chain of the Chinese past.

CHAPTER 11

CONFUCIAN LEARNING IN LATE MING THOUGHT

INTRODUCTION

The late Ming period is taken here to begin in the 1520s and cover the final six reigns of the dynasty before it collapsed in Peking in the spring of 1644. There were several moments of significant change in what might be called the political standing of those engaged in the sort of intellectual activities which attracted contemporaries' and historians' notice. In the 1520s, the newly enthroned Chia-ching Emperor succeeded in asserting his will over the leadership of the bureaucracy and alienating a significant cohort of officials and literati in the process. In the same decade, Wang Yang-ming gathered large numbers of followers to his new teachings before he died in 1529. Wang's ideas were criticized while he was still alive for deviating from the imperially sanctioned version of Neo-Confucianism. Twenty-five years later, his ideas were being taken more seriously than the official version by thousands of literati. In 1553 and 1554, for the first time in the North, large gatherings of literati and officials in Peking discussed Wang's teachings. The years 1529 to 1554 witnessed continued growth of the influence of the ideas of Wang and his disciples. During the next twenty-five years, from 1554 to 1579, there was a proliferation of versions of ideas stimulated by Wang's teachings. Men who were barely literate, as well as literati and officials, became involved in discussions of these teachings in all provinces, although they were most influential in Chekiang, Kiangsi, and the Southern Metropolitan Area (Nan Chih-li). In 1579, the powerful Grand Secretary, Chang Chü-cheng (1525–82), sought to suppress much of what he disparaged as vain philosophic chatter about morality. Chang's actions inaugurated another twenty-five year period, from 1579 to 1604, in which what we might now call dissident intellectuals, as well as the merely morally conscientious, came under attack by senior officials; a few of the more prominent dissidents were killed, and many more were forced out of office, particularly in the 1590s. By this time, all of Wang Yang-ming's own personal disciples were dead. From 1604 to 1626 was the period dominated by the Tung-lin Academy

movement, from its formal founding to its destruction. Its leaders and associates, numbering in the hundreds, sought to reintegrate Wang Yang-ming's teachings with the imperially sanctioned version of Neo-Confucianism and to reject decades of misinterpretations of Wang's message at a time when the government was beset by problems. Finally, from 1627 to beyond 1644, as it became clear that the Ming government's administrative control over the empire needed to be restored, hopes were raised that it could be done and then were dashed. Literati of various persuasions sought to identify ideas which would somehow promote order when they were initiated by the emperor, but none succeeded in time.

Core ideas

Through the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century, the intellectual scene was set against the background of a stable but not static system of ideas which, since the thirteenth century, had achieved, and then maintained, an imperially sponsored dominance. This set of ideas went by various names, including Ch'eng-Chu teachings, the Learning of the Way (*Tao hsiieh*), and learning involving nature and coherence (*hsing li hsiieh*). It later was called Sung learning, and is referred to loosely as Neo-Confucianism, sometimes intended to be taken in a narrow sense of the Learning of the Way.

The primary means by which these ideas were conveyed was through the education process which emphasized selected classical texts with accompanying commentaries by Chu Hsi (1130–1200) and others. The core curriculum consisted of the famous Four Books – the *Great Learning* and the *Mean* (which in Sung and Ming times were still attributed to Confucius' disciples, Tseng-tzu and Tzu-ssu, respectively), the *Analects* of Confucius, and the *Mencius*. Under Chu Hsi's systematic interpretation, the crucial propositions threading through these texts, as well as through the larger corpus of the Five Classics, were fairly straightforward: there are timeless, real moral values, including humaneness, righteousness, filial devotion to one's family, loyal devotion to one's ruler, and respectful devotion to ritual proprieties, which together

- (1) are the basis of all proper relationships between humans and also between humans and spirits and divinities;
- (2) are the proper means to social order;
- (3) were first and mostly clearly articulated by the sages of antiquity and set down in what became the texts of the Classics;
- (4) can be adequately apprehended through a process of learning;

- (5) can be acted on by humans now if each individual recognizes and incorporates these values in his own heart; and
- (6) are rooted and sustained in the perceptible coherence of the dynamic cosmos with which one is conjoined in an ultimate unity.

These propositions implicitly reject Buddhist notions of the reality of an ultimate nothingness and of the essentially ephemeral character of the transitory phenomenal world as well as imperial claims that the ruler is, and ought to be, the final arbiter of all values.

More and less sophisticated versions of these core ideas were, over the centuries after Chu Hsi's death, taught and memorized, debated and written about, and practiced and defied by literati (*shih*) – men whose education had reached a level of literacy high enough to participate in the civil service examination system. From the early fifteenth century on, Chu Hsi's interpretations had to be recapitulated in detail if one were to pass the examinations. However, belief in them was not required, and in their other writings, literati could depart from Chu Hsi, although his ideas served as points of departure for reflection, discussion, and exegesis. In Chu Hsi's interpretation, the core concepts were understood as something like:

- (1) setting the heart right (*cheng hsin*)
- (2) making the will authentic (*ch'eng i*)
- (3) developing knowing (*chih chih*)
- (4) investigating things (*ko wu*)¹

Chu Hsi stressed that the last phrase involved fathoming coherence (*ch'iumg li*) and that the first phrase involved bringing one's heart, including one's desires and sentiments, into congruity with the coherence (*li*) which is in the heart as one's human nature (*hsing*). Later, philosophically minded literati recognized that their contemporaries were not living the moral life which should result from according with these ideas, and some of them were motivated to continue to explore complicated problems involving the ontological status and epistemological foundations of these values in spite of Chu Hsi's attempt to settle these questions. They also sought to clarify the methods by which these values could best be apprehended and implemented by individuals, including the emperor, for the good of the community and the state as a whole. For several centuries, thinkers provided a host of simplified as well as finely nuanced interpretations without definitive result. By and large, they stayed within the framework of Chu Hsi's systematic interpretation of the Four Books, particularly the *Great Learning* and the *Mean*. When individual li-

¹ See the discussion in Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta hsüeh* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

erati moved outside of that framework, and there were many who did, they still tended to use Chu Hsi's concepts as a standard from which their own formulations were to be distinguished.

Although the core ideas of Chu Hsi's system were still being taught at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as they continued to be even into the twentieth century, there was a marked increase in significant alternatives to Chu Hsi. From the sixteenth century on, a flow of books sought to challenge Chu Hsi's ideas and shift to radically different assumptions leading to the construction of other methods and outlooks. None was so elaborate or successful as Chu Hsi's, but together they eroded the hegemony of his legacy and made way for other means of constructing the foundation of moral values and expressions of learning deemed significant for Confucians (*ju*).

The following sections explore the development in the late Ming of internal tensions within the main strand (*ta tuan*) of Confucian thinking. Within this strand, there was a proliferation of views as well as attempts to reintegrate a literati ethos that some contemporaries held was a disintegrating one, and that others hoped would be reinvigorating. The late Ming scene also had significant alternative intellectual positions which, intentionally or not, challenged the dominant ideas about learning; these positions were dismissed by some as "other strands" (*i tuan*), so long as they did not command the allegiance of a significant body of literati.² The range of ideas taught and published was diverse, and literati (*shih*) had a choice about what to think.

The elite of learning

In simplest terms, for both contemporary observers and later historians, the composition of the learned elite was determined by a single criterion: being sufficiently literate to read and write passable examination essays. In late Ming, such men were called *shih*, which was rendered into English via Latin in the seventeenth century as "literati." For better or worse, the demands of the civil examinations shaped the lives and thinking of the literati. The curriculum in state-sponsored schools was largely determined by the examinations,³ as it was in community-sponsored schools and normally in tuition in homes. Once basic literacy had been achieved, teachers and students took competence in examination essays as their primary task; learning the classical texts, reading histories, composing poetry, and perfecting one's writing were ancillary. Those who deviated to emphasize other learning could be

² The term *i tuan* appears in the *Analects*, 2.16, where it has a negative implication.

³ This generalization was made at the beginning of the treatise on the recruitment process in Chang T'ing-yü et al., *Ming shih* (1736; rpt. Peking: 1974), 69, p. 1675.

derided as idiosyncratic at best, or even foolish. The clearest manifestation of attaining a high level of literacy was to pass the highest-level examinations in the imperially sponsored system.

The examination system at every level propagated the teachings associated with the name of Chu Hsi (1130–1200). In the metropolitan examinations at the capital, the first and most important of the three day-long sessions required three essays on topics drawn from the Four Books, for which Chu Hsi's commentaries were uniquely authoritative. Also required on that first day were four essays on the candidate's chosen specialization of one among the Five Classics. For the *Book of change*, the two standard commentaries were Ch'eng Yi's and Chu Hsi's. Chu Hsi's commentary on the *Book of poetry* was the standard. For the *Book of documents*, the standard commentary was by Ts'ai Shen (1167–1230), the son of Chu Hsi's student and colleague; Ts'ai said Chu Hsi had set him the task of compilation. These three classics were the most frequently chosen for specialization.⁴ At the beginning of the fifteenth century the Yung-lo Emperor promulgated the *Great compendia* (*Ta ch'üan*), official versions of the texts and commentaries for the Four Books and Five Classics.⁵ These were the foundation on which examination essays were prepared and evaluated. They were available in every district and prefectural school as well as in many households with literati.⁶

The *chin-shih* degree, which literally meant the examination system rank of "a literatus presented [to the court]," marked its holder unambiguously with high status. Only 300 to 400 such degrees were awarded triennially. After the fifteenth century the basic number of *chin-shih* degrees granted, in principle, was 300. This number was augmented by fifty or 100 under special circumstances, e.g., the first examination under a new emperor. In practice, the numbers were subject to flux. From 1568 to 1643, the actual numbers of degrees awarded ranged from 292 in 1598 to 409 in 1622. The median number during this period of time was 340 *chin-shih* degrees awarded in 1595.⁷ Anyone who succeeded in the capital examinations was, by definition, a member of the empire-wide educated elite, regardless of his subsequent career, or lack thereof, in the civil bureaucracy, or in intellectual endeavors. Anyone who succeeded in an autumnal provincial examination, whereby he earned the degree of *chü-jen*, literally "a man recommended [to the court]," was also

4 MS, 70, p. 1694. For the *Spring and autumn annals* and its three early commentaries, the standard commentaries were by Hu An-kuo (1074–1138). For the *Record of rituals*, the standard T'ang commentaries were used.

5 MS, 70, p. 1694.

6 Alternate commentary traditions tended to be neglected after the Yung-lo period, according to Ku Yen-wu, *Jih chih lu chi shih* (1872; rpt. Taipei, 1968), 18, pp. 112a–b, "Ssu shu wu ching ta ch'üan."

7 MS, 70, p. 1697; and *Ming tai teng k'o lu hui pien* (Collection of records of successful candidates in civil examinations in Ming) in *Ming tai shih chi hui k'an*, ed. Chu'ü Wan-li (Taipei, 1969).

part of the empire-wide elite in that he was eligible to participate in the triennial examinations at the capital.

Estimates of the number of men with *chin-shih* degrees alive at any one time in late Ming are in the range of 3,000 to 5,000, assuming a life expectancy of some thirty more years, or ten examinations, after the degree was attained at an average age of about thirty. There were perhaps three to five times that many recommended men (*chü-jen*). Quotas for the provincial examinations were set from the fifteenth century and were subject to some drift upward. In late Ming about 1,200 provincial degrees were awarded every three years.⁸ Again assuming eleven or twelve subsequent provincial examinations during the life-times of those who passed, we can infer that there were something like 15,000 men alive in any given year who had attained at least the *chü-jen* degree. The two main areas directly administered (*chih-li*) from the capitals of Peking and Nanking had quotas of from 100 to more than 130; the provinces had lower quotas, all normally less than 100.⁹ The quotas were supplemented when those in control of the system "sought to win over the hearts of the literati."¹⁰

All of the men with *chin-shih* degrees had gone to Peking in the late Ming period for their examinations, as had most of those who did not advance beyond the *chü-jen* degree. In addition, the empire-wide educated elite included men who had been regularly enrolled at the Imperial Academy (*Kuo tzu chien*) at Nanking or Peking as academy students (*chien-sheng*).¹¹ At the capitals they were preferred students; they formed alliances with their peers and were patronized by official superiors. They were given probationary duties in government offices while still students, and many went on to accept regular, though low level, bureaucratic appointments without receiving a higher examination degree. Some academy students served in auxiliary capacities in provincial examinations. Many of them went on to *chü-jen* and *chin-shih* degrees, so their numbers do not greatly add to the total of the empire-wide educated elite, but they must be noticed as the younger cohort of that elite and as an important component of the pool of ranked officials. The Imperial Academies were empire-wide in the sense that men from every province were regularly included in them.

8 Ho Ping-ti, *The ladder of success in imperial China* (New York, 1964), p. 184, estimates the cumulative number of *chü-jen* to be about 10,000 for the Ch'ing period, and, by implication, somewhat fewer than that in Ming.

9 *MS*, 70, p. 1697.

10 *MS*, 70, p. 1687.

11 In late Ming the degrees of tribute student (*kung sheng*) and academy student (*chien-sheng*) were available for purchase by those qualified to sit for the provincial examination. See Ho, *The ladder of success*, p. 183 and esp. pp. 27–34. I am referring here only to the tribute students who went to Nanking or Peking to attend the Imperial Academy as regular students.

There also were regional, provincial and local (i.e., city or town) elites of educated men, again largely determined by participation in the examination system. These elites included men with a capital or provincial degree who were resident in that place, whether serving as officials or not. They also included all the men who had some official status as students (*sheng*) by virtue of having passed a qualifying examination administered at the prefectural level in order to become holders of the degree of certified student (*sheng-yüan*) or tribute student (*kung-sheng* – a degree that also was available for purchase by *sheng-yüan*). Many tribute students accepted appointments to office, commonly in educational capacities. All *sheng-yüan* were at least nominally enrolled in a state-sponsored prefectural, county or *wei* school, or in an Imperial Academy. Of lower status than the certified students, but also to be included among the local educated elite were those men formally recognized, usually by the district magistrate, as preparatory students (*t'ung-sheng*). The preparatory students were eligible for the prefectural examinations which would, if passed, confirm them as certified students.¹²

The number of certified students (*sheng-yüan*) continued to expand through the dynasty. There were no effective quotas and the pool became quite large.¹³ For example, the rhetorically inflated figure of some 40,000 literati (probably not all of them *sheng-yüan*) was used in describing those involved in a riot in 1570 at the gate of a Kiangsi prefectural examination hall, probably in Nan-ch'ang.¹⁴ Chang Chü-cheng sought a reduction in the number of certified students, and in response some education officials supposedly cut back certification of students at the prefectural examination to nearly zero,¹⁵ but with little long term effect. For the late Ming period Ku Yen-wu estimated the number of certified students (*sheng-yüan*) to be at least 1,000 in a large district, with an average of some 300 certified students for each of the approximately 2,000 districts (*chou* and *hsien*) in the empire, or more than 500,000 certified students at any one time.¹⁶

How many preparatory students – that is, men who never achieved the status of certified student by passing the prefectural qualifying examination – were there? Miyazaki Ichisada guessed that four times as many men were

12 The *Ming shih* explained that the literati who had not entered a 'school' were commonly called preparatory students (*t'ung sheng*), *MS*, 69, p. 1687.

13 *MS*, 69, p. 1686.

14 Wang Shih-chen, *Yen-shan t'ang pieh chi* (1590), rpt. in *Chung-kuo shih-hsiieh ts'ung-shu*, 16 (Taipei, 1965), 83.10B, p. 3608.

15 *MS*, 69, p. 1687. Cf. *DMB*, p. 58. In 1575, Chang Chü-cheng's order was to pass between five and fifty certified students, according to the size and past achievements of the prefecture.

16 Ku Yen-wu, "Sheng-yüan lun (shang)." In *Ku T'ing-lin shih wen chi* (Peking: Chung-hua, 1959), 1, pp. 22 and 24. Ho, *The ladder of success*, p. 181, cites Ku's estimate and also suggests the figure of 600,000 *sheng-yüan* might be a minimum for late Ming.

recognized in the counties as eligible to try the prefectural examination as were allowed to pass.¹⁷ F. W. Mote's inference was that between twenty-five and 100 men tried to become certified students for each one who passed.¹⁸ Such a high ratio may have prevailed in some prefectures in Chiang-nan and Fukien, where standards and facilities were more advanced and access to education was relatively easy. For example, the compilers of the 1586 edition of the prefectural gazetteer for Shao-hsing in Chekiang proudly wrote, "Nowadays, even the very poor would be ashamed if they did not instruct their sons in the classics. From tradesmen to local-government runners there are very few who cannot read or punctuate."¹⁹ But such proliferation of education, even if not exaggerated, certainly did not prevail across the empire. My impression is that in late Ming, the competitive blockage in the system occurred after the certified student level; it was widely perceived that there were too many of them, given the severe restrictions of the quotas for the provincial examinations. It does not seem that there were large numbers of men at the preparatory student level who were generally regarded as blocked from advancement, nor that there were large numbers who were worthy but unable to secure recognition, normally from the county magistrate and educational intendants, as preparatory students. On the contrary, such recognition seems to have been routinely granted to teenage boys with the appropriate education. My own guess is that, in late Ming in any given year, for every certified student there were fewer than ten other men who had learned how to write examination essays and who either would go on to become certified students themselves or, for whatever reasons, would never attain that status. If vague numbers are acceptable, a consensus view might be that there were between 1 million and 10 million men who had been educated to that level.²⁰ Put another way, roughly 10 percent of the male population in late Ming may have had a high level of educational achievement, fewer than 1 percent were certified students, and fewer than 0.01 percent had passed the palace examinations to become *chin-shih*. (These percentages would be doubled if we considered only adult males.)

In late Ming, the students or learners (*hsüeh sheng*) – boys and men recognized by the system and the community as engaged in learning – and the at-least nominally learned (*hsüeh-che*), men who had higher degrees, plus a rela-

17 Miyazaki Ichisada, *China's examination bell: The civil service examinations of imperial China*, trans. Conrad Schirokauer (New York and Tokyo, 1976), p. 24.

18 F. W. Mote, "China's past in the study of China today," *JAS*, 32 (1972), pp. 107–20.

19 Translated in Ho, *The ladder of success*, p. 251, from *Shao-hsing fu chih*, 12, p. 2a.

20 David Johnson, manipulating somewhat different numbers, guesses there were "at least 5,000,000 classically educated male commoners in Ch'ing times." David Johnson, "Communication, class, and consciousness in late imperial China," in *Popular culture in late imperial China*, eds. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley, 1985), p. 59.

tively small number of men of high literary attainment who yet had never achieved formal status beyond that of certified student, constituted the educated elite: an elite which overlapped, to an important extent, with past, present, and potential holders of political and economic power. These were the literati (*shih*). They wrote most of the books and they were the main audience for most of the books printed in late Ming, if the word *most* is reckoned in terms of numbers of titles. The total number of *copies* of religious tracts, how-to books, and soon, that circulated for those with some reading ability who were not literati may have exceeded the total number of *copies* of books which only could be read by literati, although that seems unlikely for late Ming. The thinking, speaking, and above all, the writing of the literati are the main materials forming what historians identify as intellectual trends in late Ming.

THE LEARNING OF THE WAY IN LATE MING

In the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the Learning of the Way (*Tao hsüeh*) that stemmed from the teachings associated with Chu Hsi's name was still dominant throughout the empire. It remained the standard for education for examinations, but it was breaking apart as a credible philosophical system. Wang Yang-ming's challenging new idea of innate moral knowing (*liang chih*) attracted attention and followers from the 1520s on. This idea also attracted opposition, not always from positions that Chu Hsi had articulated. Chan Jo-shui (1466–1560) was a prominent thinker who did not succumb to Wang Yang-ming, but stood as an alternative. In the often-quoted judgment in the *Ming History*, "At that time, those who were involved in true learning all followed Chan Jo-shui if they did not follow Wang Yang-ming; only the likes of Lü Nan and Lo Ch'in-shun maintained Ch'eng-Chu teachings unaltered."²¹ Some of those who altered the emphasis of the teachings did not depart from their principles.

Chan Jo-shui, a 1505 *chin-shih* from Kwangtung, was a declared disciple of Ch'en Hsien-chang and is conventionally described as a philosophical heir of Lu Chiu-yüan in stressing "mind" (*hsin*). Nevertheless, in two crucial respects, Chan Jo-shui remained committed to Chu Hsi's position. Chan emphasized the importance of learning, of conscious intellectual effort; he insisted this had to go along with meditation and other quietistic means of self-cultivation in the process of preparing oneself for moral action as taught in the "Great Learning" and as a way to avoid ending up in a Buddhistic stance. Second, his slogan was that one should seek to realize the coherence

21 *MS*, 282, p. 7244.

of Heaven (*t'ien li*) everywhere: in one's heart, as well as in the world at large; one had to understand coherence as unitary, yet also understand it in its multiplicity and specificity.²² For Chan, the "investigation of things" still meant to fathom their coherence; he argued that this included Wang's notion of "innate knowing" (*liang chih*). Both Wang Yang-ming and Huang Tsung-hsi recognized that Chan taught that we can seek moral coherence in the external, phenomenal world (including books), even as he also sought to equate "mind" with the "coherence of Heaven."²³ In this sense, Chan remained an advocate of the pivotal idea in the Learning of the Way that was associated with Chu Hsi.

Chan Jo-shui served in high positions in both Nanking and Peking and did not retire until 1540. While in office, he demonstrated his commitment to intellectual activity by writing commentaries on the Four Books and on each of the Five Classics; he oversaw the compilation of 100 *chüan* on statecraft and moral improvement for the emperor under the rubric of the "investigation of things;" he published work which "corrected" Chu Hsi's.²⁴ He never received high marks from historians for his classical scholarship, but he made the effort to connect his ideas with the classics and his Sung predecessors. He also founded some thirty-six academies, mainly in Kwangtung and around Nanking. Through these, and through his role as an examiner, he was credited, after his death in 1560, with having had almost 4,000 disciples.²⁵ Chan was treated with respect by Wang Yang-ming's followers (as in his visit to Kiangsi after retiring from office), but in spite of his longevity, he had little long-term effect. Many of his followers drifted toward Wang's teachings. One of his nominal followers, Lü Nan, did not.

Lü Nan (1479–1542) was the top-ranked *chin-shih* in the 1508 examination at which Chan Jo-shui was one of the administrators. A model of integrity, Lü repeatedly went home to Shensi after submitting memorials critical of his emperors, their leading eunuchs, and current government practices. Although Lü continued to advocate Ch'eng-Chu teachings, he also defended both Wang Yang-ming and Chan Jo-shui from denunciations calling for their prohibition as false learning.²⁶ A high official at Nanking in the 1530s, Lü presided together with Wang's disciple Tsou Shou-i and with Chan Jo-

22 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an* (1691; rpt. Taipei, 1987), 37, pp. 876, 881, and 883.

23 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, pp. 877 and 883–84.

24 For an analysis of the content of Chan Jo-shui's book in its immediate political context, see Chu Hung-lam, "Ming ju Chan Jo-shui chuan ti-hsüeh yung shu 'Sheng-hsüeh ko-wu t'ung' te cheng-chih pei-ching y nei-jung t'e-se," in *Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan li-shih yü-yen yen-chiu so chi k'ian*, 62.3 (1993), pp. 493–530.

25 Hou Wai-lu, Ch'iu Han-sheng, and Chang Ch'i-chih, *Sung Ming Li-hsüeh shih* (Peking, 1984–87), p. 171.

26 *DMB*, pp. 1011–12.

shui at large meetings for discourses on learning.²⁷ A century later, Liu Tsung-chou recorded that Lü's discourses had been nearly as successful as Wang Yang-ming's. Liu also conceded that Lü's emphasis on moral action, exemplified by his uncompromising integrity, was an important corrective to some of Wang's disciples' preoccupation with mere talk about "knowing."²⁸ Lü's conduct was also praised by Huang Tsung-hsi, who nevertheless was scathing about his comprehension of the philosophical issues in question.²⁹ Lü Nan's lectures and comments on the Four Books, the Five Classics, and five of the great Sung thinkers associated with the Learning of the Way were printed as books, but they had little impact in defending Chu Hsi on philosophical grounds.

Lü was admired as a major thinker in the northwest, where more conservative adherence to Chu Hsi's teachings prevailed, but elsewhere their attraction declined as their defense fell to weak hands. Intentionally alternative interpretations to Chu Hsi's associated with the teachings of Wang Yang-ming became endemic. By the Lung-ch'ing reign (1567–72), Chu Hsi's teachings were eclipsed, even if only temporarily.³⁰

Proliferation of interpretations: the first generation

In contrast to commitments to Chu Hsi's teachings, commitments to Wang Yang-ming's teachings after his death in 1529 were vigorous, but so vigorous that interpretations proliferated. Wang was personally heard by thousands, and in part because of his charismatic appeal, he had hundreds of declared disciples. Five of them might serve to illustrate the elaboration of his ideas as propagated by his disciples.

Ch'ien Te-hung (1496–1574) was from the same district as Wang Yang-ming and became his disciple in the early 1520s. Along with Wang Chi, Ch'ien had special responsibilities in helping to teach the flood of men who came to study with their master, and the two of them continued to teach his ideas when Wang Yang-ming went to supervise military campaigns in Kwangsi in 1527.³¹ Before he left Shao-hsing, his two leading disciples sat down next to him one evening at the T'ien-ch'üan Bridge to ask for clarification of a crucial proposition in his teachings. For Chu Hsi, we must correct our hearts (*cheng hsin*) from our innately good moral natures (*hsing*). Ch'ien Te-hung

27 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 8, p. 138, and *DMB*, p. 1011.

28 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, "Shih shuo," p. 11, trans. in Julia Ching, *Records*, p. 66.

29 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 8, p. 138.

30 This was the eighteenth-century view, expressed in *Ssu-k'ü ch'üan shu tsung-mu t' i yao*, eds. Chi Yün, et al. (1933; rpt. Taipei, 1971), ch. 97, p. 2006, under Chu-tzu Sheng-hsüeh k'ao lüeh.

31 See *DMB*, pp. 241–42.

and Wang Chi both accepted the revision of Chu Hsi's teachings in which the basis of our goodness, our personal moral coherence (*li*), is our heart (or mind) rather than only in our human nature (*hsing*), as Chu Hsi taught. However, they saw different implications in Wang Yang-ming's interpretation that our heart, or mind, is coterminous with moral coherence, or principle, and that therefore our "mind" cannot be corrected or rectified. Wang Yang-ming's interpretation was distilled into four sentences. "In the original substance of the mind [or mind-in-itself] there is no distinction between good and evil. When the will is active, however, the distinction [of good and evil] exists. The faculty of innate knowing (*liang chih*) is to know [or distinguish] good and evil. Doing good and removing evil is 'the rectification of external affairs' [*ko wu*, which Chu Hsi called 'the investigation of things']."³² For Ch'ien Te-hung, these sentences meant that we must make an effort to recognize good and do it and to recognize evil and avoid it, an inference which Wang Chi doubted. When they asked Wang Yang-ming for clarification that evening at the T'ien-ch'üan Bridge, he endorsed both disciples' interpretations, even though they are apparently contradictory,³³ and Wang Chi and Ch'ien Te-hung pursued the divergent interpretations for decades after Wang Yang-ming died in 1529.

Ch'ien Te-hung mourned his master almost as if he were a parent, and then, with Wang Chi, went to Peking in 1532 to complete the requirements for the *chin-shih* degree. Ch'ien had an aborted official career. He served in several minor capacities, and was in the Ministry of Justice in 1541 when he ran afoul of the emperor's will and was imprisoned. He was reduced to commoner status and released after two years. He never held another office. However, Ch'ien did not live in obscure retirement. According to Huang Tsung-hsi's account, during the nearly thirty years Ch'ien Te-hung was out of office, "there was not one day on which he did not engage in discoursing on learning,"³⁴ which he sometimes did with Wang Chi. In 1548 Ch'ien went to visit Chan Jo-shui, who was in retirement near Canton. Ch'ien recalled that, in the 1520s, Chan sent a letter to Wang Yang-ming discussing the relation-

32 The four sentence teaching is given in Wang Yang-ming, *Instructions for practical living*, trans. Wing Tsit Chan (New York, 1963), pp. 243–44. I have altered some of the translations in accordance with the discussion in Mou Tsung-san, "The immediate successor of Wang Yang-ming: Wang Lung-hsi and his theory of *ssu-wu*", *Philosophy East and West*, 23 (1973), pp. 103–20, and Mou Tsung-san, "Wang hsüeh te fen-hua yü fa-chan," *Hsin Ya shu-yüan hsüeh-shu nien-ke'an*, 14 (1972), esp. pp. 106–15. T'ang Chün-i, "The development of the concept of moral mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi," in *Self and society in Ming thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary, Studies in Oriental Culture, No. 4 (New York and London, 1970), pp. 93–119, provides an excellent short account of the several interpretive positions on mind in the Learning of the Way from Chu Hsi to Wang Chi.

33 Wang Yang-ming, *Instructions for Practical Living*, pp. 244–45.

34 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 11, p. 225. Cf. *The Records of Ming scholars by Huang Tsung-hsi*, ed. Julia Ching (Honolulu, 1987), p. 112. Also in *DMB* under Ch'ien Te-hung, by Julia Ching.

ship between “innate knowing” (*liang chih*) and “universal coherence” (*t’ien li*); declining to answer the letter, Wang Yang-ming had told Ch’ien that the issue needed to be most carefully explicated and that a hasty response would lead to controversy. If Wang had conceded that “innate knowing” was identical to “universal coherence,” then there was little reason to reinterpret Chu Hsi’s call for the investigation of things in order to fathom coherence, as Chu included meditation and introspection as methods; if Wang denied the identity to pursue his original contribution, then his concept of “innate knowing” contained the possibility of being relativized, particular to each individual. When Ch’ien came to call twenty years later, Chan Jo-shui pointed out that this is exactly what had happened. “Nowadays followers of your school say that ‘innate knowing’ does not entail learning or thinking, and they act on it by relying on their own wills and knowledge.”³⁵ How, Chan asked, could this be called “innate knowing” of moral good?, and Ch’ien Te-hung, ever accommodating, even in his own telling, could only agree. But Ch’ien also defended Wang Yang-ming’s teachings. Ch’ien compiled the detailed chronological account of his master’s life, and he contributed to the publication of Wang’s letters and recorded conversations to try to preserve and clarify the teachings which were being expounded by dozens of disciples. Ch’ien wrote in 1556, “Now it has not been three decades since the death of our teacher and it seems that his wise sayings and profound tenets are gradually fading away. Has this bad effect not come about because our group has not practiced them personally with sufficient effort, but has talked too much instead? As the tendencies of followers have become diverse, the [true] doctrines of our school have not spread.”³⁶ As an insider, Ch’ien Te-hung recognized the proliferation of interpretations as a problem, but his efforts could not prevent them. Until he was seventy Ch’ien traveled in Chiang-nan, Hu-kuang, and Kwangtung to expound his understanding of Wang Yang-ming’s four sentences that innate knowing involved effort to be applied. Even though he vacillated over interpretations of his master’s teachings, Ch’ien was portrayed later as a devoted follower.³⁷

In contrast to Ch’ien Te-hung, his fellow leading disciple from Shao-hsing, Wang Chi (1498–1583) was recognized by many of his contemporaries, and in retrospect by historians, as the most original thinker among Wang Yang-ming’s personal followers. Wang Chi’s doubts about the formulation of their master’s four-sentence teaching prompted the discussion at the T’ien-

35 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiieh an*, 11, p. 230. Liu Tsung-chou is recorded by Huang Tsu-hsi as declaring that for Wang, “innate knowing just is universal coherence.” Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiieh an*, 16, pp. 334–35.

36 Translated in Wang Yang-ming, *Instructions for practical living*, p. 262.

37 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiieh an*, 11, p. 226. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 113.

ch'üan Bridge in 1527. By most accounts, Wang Yang-ming reaffirmed his version as primary, but Wang Chi received sufficient endorsement of his interpretation that he taught his own, negative version of the four sentences over the next fifty years.

According to Wang Chi (and Wang Yang-ming), lesser students who have not already realized that mind-in-itself has no good and no evil (as in the first sentence of Wang Yang-ming's four-sentence teaching) are in need of moral cultivation and are encumbered in the state of being (*yu*). Wang Chi taught there is a more immediate version for superior students. By having already realized that "having no good and no evil is mind-in-itself," they can avoid being entangled by the state of being and comprehend Wang Chi's concepts of "mind without [the form of] mind (*wu hsin chih hsin*), volition without [the form of] volition, knowing without [the form of] knowing, and thing without [the form of] thing." When one comprehends Wang Chi's notions, then the ordinary things of the phenomenal world do not move or disturb that formless entity, or activity, which is the manifestation of innate-knowing-in-itself.³⁸ This is Wang Chi's so-called negative version of the four sentence teaching; it involves apprehending aspects of the state of nothing or non-being (*wu*). Wang Chi moved mind beyond that which has no good and no evil to that which is no mind (*wu hsin*). By trusting to this innate knowing which is beyond the state of being as well as beyond good and evil, one becomes a sage. Wang Yang-ming's concept of innate knowing opened a door wide to the possibilities inherent in apprehending moral good for oneself (instead of learning it from others). Wang Chi himself pointed out how wide. One day, when Wang Yang-ming asked him what he had seen when he was out, Wang Chi replied, "I saw the streets were filled with sage humans." Wang Yang-ming responded, "You saw the streets filled with [potential] sage humans; the humans filling the streets saw you are a manifest sage human."³⁹ Wang Chi's intuition was accessible to all who would truly grasp it. It was a self-understanding which was beyond moral practice as then conventionally understood.

After he became a *chin-shih* in 1532 Wang Chi served in minor positions in Nanking for a few years. Partly because of his prominent association with Wang Yang-ming, he suffered the animosity of some high officials. He resigned from office in 1541, when Ch'ien Te-hung was arrested, and never accepted another appointment. Devoting his life to teaching his understanding of innate knowing, he traveled and lectured, often together with Ch'ien

38 Mou, "The immediate successor of Wang Yang-ming," p. 120.

39 Wang Yang-ming, *Ch'uanhsilu*, ch. 3, p. 151 in *Wang Wen-ch'eng kungch'üan chi* (late Ming), rpt. in *Ssu-pu ts'ung k'an* (Shanghai, 1926). Also in Wang, *Instructions for practical living*, pp. 239–40.

Te-hung, in both capitals and all the southern provinces.⁴⁰ In the Lung-ch'ing reign when he was being considered again for office, Wang Chi wrote that his task was discoursing on learning (*chiang hsüeh*) with his friends. The *Ming History* observed that toward the end of Wang Chi's life, "of the numerous officials and literati at the capitals who were involved in discourses on learning, the perspicacious, enlightened conversationalists promoted Wang Chi's ideas."⁴¹ In 1588 Wang Chi's disciple, Hsiao Liang-kan (1534–1602), published Wang Chi's extant letters, prefaces, poems and miscellaneous writings along with records of his lectures and conversations. According to Hsiao, Wang Chi thought he was less able in writing and preferred to convey his teaching to his contemporaries through the spoken word.⁴² In this, Wang Chi was like the other disciples in using the medium of discourses rather than written texts.

As Wang Chi, his contemporaries, and most of his readers since have recognized, his negative teaching is similar to, and perhaps indistinguishable from, the central teachings of Ch'an Buddhism.⁴³ Regardless of whether his contemporaries or later readers judged that Wang Chi's thinking had crossed some putative boundary such that it was grounded in Buddhist doctrine rather than in the (Confucian) Learning of the Way, Wang Chi, in his discourses and writings, was centrally important in the co-opting of Buddhist ideas by literati from mid-century on. Earlier, Wang Yang-ming had taught that the originally unitary Way had been separated into three, and that Taoist and Buddhist teachings still contained some of the original, particularly with regard to the concepts of human nature (*hsing*) and destiny (*ming*).⁴⁴ Extending his master's position, Wang Chi emphasized that the sages' teachings share a common concern with the Buddhists' stillness (*chi*) and Taoists' emptiness (*hsü*), and with their goal of returning to one's (original) nature (*fu-hsing*). Even though he declined to regard them as unacceptable "other strands" (*i tuan*), Wang Chi was not intending to subordinate Confucian (*ju*) teachings to Buddhism or Taoism.⁴⁵ For Wang Chi, the goal was to redis-

40 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 12, p. 238. Biography in Wang Chi, *Wang Lung-hsi hsien-sheng ch'üan chi* (1588; rpt. Taipei, 1970), esp. pp. 20–21 and pp. 26–27. Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 110–11. Entry under Wang Chi by Ching in Goodrich and Fang, *DMB. MS*, 283, pp. 7271–72.

41 *MS*, 283, p. 7275.

42 Hsiao Liang-kan, preface, 12, to *Wang Lung-hsi ch'üan chi*. Cf. Araki Kengo, *Minmatsu shükkyō shisō kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1979), p. 100. Huang Tsung-hsi noted that some thought Wang Chi wrote better than he talked, Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 762. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 188.

43 Huang Tsung-hsi judged that Wang Chi's interpretation of the four negatives resembled Ch'an Buddhism. Mou Tsung-san explicitly dissented from Huang in this. Mou, "Immediate successor," p. 120. Cf. Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, p. 226.

44 Wang Yang-ming, *Wang Wen-ch'eng kung ch'üan chi*, ch. 34, pp. 959–60, in his *nien p'u*.

45 Wang Chi, "San chiao t'ang chi," in *Wang Lung-hsi hsien-sheng Wang ch'üan chi*, ch. 17, pp. 1316–18. Also cited in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih* (1948; rpt. Taipei, 1962), p. 115. Cf. Ying-shih Yü, "The intellectual world of Chiao Hung revisited," *Ming Studies*, 25 (1988), p. 34.

cover the original, integral Confucian sages' teaching or Way, from which later generations had strayed. He urged that it could be done by using one's fully realized innate moral knowing (*liang chih*) to comprehend the traces of that original Way in the three teachings, and vice versa. The slogan for this interpretation in effect was "the three teachings return to Confucianism" (*san chiao kuei ju*).⁴⁶

His interpretation, however attractive, did not command universal adherence, not even among the declared early followers of Wang Yang-ming's teachings. Nevertheless, the effect of Wang Chi's negative interpretation of the four sentences and innate knowing was to contribute to breaking apart the synthesis Wang Yang-ming had sought to achieve by explaining innate knowing as entailing *both* moral knowing and moral action or conduct. For Wang Yang-ming, the functioning (*yung*) of the axiological mind and its fundamental aspect (*i*) are not only inseparable but identical.⁴⁷ Wang Chi's interpretation emphasized a transcendent, quiescent knowing of the mind which does not have the form of mind. Other followers of Wang Yang-ming put their emphasis on more immediate, less rarefied interpretations.

Among Wang Yang-ming's personal disciples, an alternative to Wang Chi's emphasis on the philosophical subtleties involved in comprehending "no mind" was the emphasis on effectuating sagehood in one's own person and presenting that model to a wider literati audience. Although its roots went back to Confucius, this emphasis was associated particularly with Wang Ken (1483–1540) from T'ai-chou in Nan Chih-li.⁴⁸ Even before he met Wang Yang-ming in 1520, Wang Ken had been working with the idea that within himself, and indeed within every human, was the capacity to actually *be* a sage, not just to have the mind of one. In one form or another, the presumption of this possibility was a standard, though usually neglected, part of the Learning of the Way from Sung times, with precedents going back to the *Mencius*. On one of his trips into Shantung (perhaps to trade in salt), Wang Ken, who was barely literate at the time, visited the temple dedicated to Confucius in Ch'ü-fu. According to Keng Ting-hsiang, Wang asked himself how this human, Confucius, had come to be honored for generations as a sage. Wang Ken determined that being a sage did not require great learning (as Chu Hsi taught) or subtle mental insights (as Wang Chi taught); it merely required acting as sages had acted.

46 See Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 116–17.

47 T'ang Chün-i, "The development of the concept of moral mind from Wang Yang-ming to Wang Chi," in *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, pp. 100–04.

48 A useful summary account of Wang Ken is in de Bary, *Self and society*, pp. 157–77. His note 29 lists the main primary and secondary materials on Wang Ken. Also see Goodrich and Fang, *DMB*, under Wang Ken. The account in Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih* (Peking, 1959), Vol. 4B, pp. 958–95, is critical and detailed.

The son of a salt maker from T'ai-chou prefecture in the salt fields northeast of Yang-chou, Wang Ken never became educated enough to qualify as a literatus. When challenged on which classical texts he had studied, Wang Ken responded that he apprehended the classics in general.⁴⁹ After a profound dream experience when he was in his twenties, he began to wear what he thought were the robe, hat, and belt prescribed in the classic ritual texts; he sought to emulate the sage, Yao. Detailed textual study, exhaustive reading of commentaries, extensive passages memorized – Wang Ken felt these were no part of being a sage. Anyone who talks, walks, and dresses like a sage is a sage. Wang Ken had these ideas before he went, wearing his antique garb, to Kiangsi to call on the famous governor and teacher, Wang Yang-ming, who received him with courtesy.

After some doubts, Wang Ken declared himself to be Wang Yang-ming's follower when he understood that the new concept of innate knowing provided a powerful underpinning for Wang Ken's own belief that he knew from within himself about sagehood without being dependent on texts or teachings, not even Wang Yang-ming's. Wang Ken's self-reliance troubled Wang Yang-ming, who tried to check him, but without much success.⁵⁰ While Wang Yang-ming was alive, Wang Ken hung up a sign which read, "This Way of mine connects Fu-hsi, Shen-nung, the Yellow emperor, Yao, Shun, Yü, King T'ang, King Wen, King Wu, the Duke of Chou, and Confucius. I transmit it to any whose heart is set on learning, regardless of his age, station, or intelligence."⁵¹ Wang Ken was laughed at for this, and not only for its presumption in his placing himself in a direct line from the most venerable sages of antiquity. The important point simply is that he was presenting the model of Confucius, the sage, to all manner of men, not just literati, in many parts of China.⁵²

For more than a decade after Wang Yang-ming's death in 1529, Wang Ken used lectures, conversations, and his own model behavior to spread his message that being a sage was a task that involved bringing one's behavior into conformity with the behavior of a sage. Wang Ken's anti-intellectual teaching called for a shift of the locus of our efforts from our mind (which Wang Chi stressed) to our physical self or body (*shen*). Beginning with the conventional premises that we should venerate (*tsun*) the Way and our moral human nature (*te hsing*), and that the Way and human nature are unitary (whether the unity

49 Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, Vol. 4B, p. 960; cf. pp. 974–75.

50 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 32, p. 709. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 174. Also see Hou, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, Vol. 4B, pp. 971–72.

51 Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, Vol. 4B, p. 962. Also trans. in *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 159.

52 See Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, Vol. 4B, p. 999.

is mediated by coherence or mind if they are taken to be categorically different), Wang Ken added the idea of one's self or body (*shen*) to the formula of unity. He then could ask rhetorically, is there a difference between venerating the Way and venerating one's self? As there is none, then it is perfectly appropriate to venerate one's self, which was a new idea for most Confucians and uncomfortable for some. But for Wang Ken, it was a source of self-confidence. "If you yourself do not venerate and trust [your 'self'], how can you cause others to venerate and trust it?" This is the crux of Wang's inspiring message which made him famous. Unencumbered by erudition or titles, he preached the doctrine of self-confidence to others.⁵³ We can act out our innate knowing, which we discover by acting, not by meditating. By acting it out in our own person, we bring peace to the whole world, not by waiting for government to act.⁵⁴

Wang Ken's enthusiastic teachings were transmitted by himself and his followers to large audiences which included unskilled workers and artisans as well as literati and officials. The precedents for this were Buddhist. Learning (*hsüeh*), not just book learning, had been a literati prerogative. Its propagation to a broader audience including short coats (*luan i*) was a growing phenomenon through the sixteenth century. Wang Yang-ming had accepted the barely literate Wang Ken as a follower, and Wang Ken was even more accessible to the uneducated. There are anecdotal accounts of Wang Ken influencing firewood gatherers and pottery kiln workers.⁵⁵ Wang Ken advertised that he "travels to mountains and forests to meet recluses, and to marketplaces and village wells to arouse the uneducated."⁵⁶ There is inadequate evidence to determine how many non-literati were receptive to Wang Ken's message or how it affected their conduct; his main audience still was literati. One of his disciples was Lin Ch'un (1498–1541). From a poor family in T'ai-chou, he received support from Wang Ken for his education. Lin ranked first in the metropolitan examination of 1532 and became a *chin-shih* that year along with Ch'ien Te-hung and Wang Chi. The latter two disciples did not become fully engaged in propagating their versions of Wang Yang-ming's teachings until after both Wang Ken and Lin Ch'un were dead. Thus, during the 1530s, Wang Ken as a commoner in the south and Lin Ch'un as an official in the northern capital were influential in spreading the idea that one must

53 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsiueh an*, 32, p. 725. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 184.

54 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsiueh an*, 3, p. 709. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 174–75. Also see Hou, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang i'ung shih*, Vol. 4B, pp. 991–92; and *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 165.

55 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsiueh an*, 32, pp. 719–20. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 181–82; also in Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang i'ung shih*, pp. 997–98; and *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, pp. 171–73.

56 Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang i'ung shih*, Vol. 4B, p. 997. Also trans. in *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 174.

manifest the sagely moral teachings in one's own person. It was later observed that among officials and literati in the capital who concerned themselves with discourses on learning (*chiang hsüeh*), to which Lin was devoted, those who stressed actual implementation took the morally fastidious Lin Ch'un as a model, in contrast to those who preferred discoursing on achieving enlightenment in one's mind, whose model was Wang Chi.⁵⁷

According to Huang Tsung-hsi, both Wang Chi and Wang Ken, in their different ways, were instrumental in spreading their master's teachings throughout the empire, and both, by not staying true to his concepts, were responsible for the ensuing drift toward understanding those teachings in Ch'an-like terms.⁵⁸ Ch'ien Te-hung and the other personal disciples in the eastern coastal provinces, from Shao-hsing to the northern capital, all went astray as they glossed or extended Wang Yang-ming's ideas. Again, according to Huang Tsung-hsi, only the disciples from Kiangsi transmitted their master's ideas and made inferences which properly transmitted his teachings.⁵⁹ Perhaps the several disciples from Kiangsi who did not distort Wang's ideas had a better foundation because they began their association with him earlier than the ones in Shao-hsing and thus stayed on track in developing the implications of "extending innate knowing" (*chih liang chih*).

Tsou Shou-i (1491–1562), for example, met Wang Yang-ming in 1511, the year Tsou was ranked third in the *chin-shih* examination. In 1517, Tsou went to call on Wang, who was coordinating military affairs in southern Kiangsi. After discussing Wang's new interpretation of the "Great Learning," Tsou declared himself a disciple and remained as a member of Wang's entourage for several years. In the 1520s, Tsou served as an official, but also went to visit Wang in Shao-hsing. Tsou recorded in his own version of the gist of the 1527 conversation at the T'ien-ch'üan Bridge that Wang Yang-ming had smiled and said that Ch'ien Te-hung and Wang Chi both should recognize each other's bias, the one toward the need for "effort" (*kung fu*) to attain morality and the other toward reliance on the "original substance" (*pen-t'i*) of the mind; in Tsou's version, the two approaches need to be made one, which, by implication, is what Tsou thought his position was.⁶⁰ For Tsou, the method involved being reverent (*ching*). Being truly reverent was inseparable from being in accord with one's nature and obviated the dangers (exemplified by Ch'ien and Wang Chi) of being biased to either outer or

57 *MS*, 283, p. 7275. Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 32, pp. 744–45.

58 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 32, p. 703. See Ching, *Records*, p. 165.

59 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 16, p. 333. See Ching, *Records*, p. 118. Huang's claim, which reiterates his own teacher's judgment about Wang's teachings, is generally accepted without question in twentieth-century literature on late Ming thought.

60 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 16, p. 341.

inner aspects of moral realization.⁶¹ Like Ch'ien and Wang Chi, Tsou Shou-i was retired from office after 1541. He returned home to An-fu in Kiangsi and for the next twenty years he toured constantly to the prefectures and neighboring provinces for discourses on learning which were attended by thousands. Tsou taught literati his balanced interpretation of the moral philosophy based on innate knowing.

These four examples illustrate Wang Yang-ming's leading disciples' developing divergent interpretations which were still true to his concepts at least in the sense that he had not denied them. The disciples were critical of each other, but they did not become sectarian rivals, even after 1541 when their careers as officials were over. They corresponded, appeared together, and had over-lapping circles of friends, disciples, and students. Unlike their master, who was famously successful in his years of military and administrative service, these disciples had aborted careers in government. Like their master, they did not leave extensive formal writings on the issues being discussed. Because the teachings were conveyed orally, there was ample room for debatable differences. Chu Hsi also generated an extensive record (set down by others) of his conversations and responses to oral and written questions, nor were his disciples perfectly uniform in their understandings of his teachings, but there was not the proliferation of interpretations that characterized Wang's heritage. The difference is that in the sixteenth century discoursing on learning (*chiang hsiieh*) was the medium for propagating new interpretations before a wide audience of educated men.

A disciple who was both committed to disseminating Wang Yang-ming's teachings by engaging in discourses on learning and also successful in his official career is Ou-yang Te (1496–1554). In the autumn of 1516, he passed the Kiangsi provincial examination and went to the southern part of the province to study with the governor, Wang Yang-ming. Although Wang was being criticized for deviating from Chu Hsi's teachings, Ou-yang, as a talented young man, decided that Wang's was the "correct learning" (*cheng hsiieh*) and became his disciple. Ou-yang did not go to Peking for the *chin-shih* examinations until 1523 and, by passing then, he began a thirty-year career, mostly with appointments in the capitals, culminating in the post of Minister of Rites. He died in that office in 1554.

Ou-yang Te's contribution to the propagation of Wang Yang-ming's teachings was not so much doctrinal as institutional. When Wang was out of office in the 1520s, he attracted hundreds to Shao-hsing to hear his discourses on learning, and often they had to settle for discourses by the two leading disciples, Ch'ien Te-hung and Wang Chi. Wang Ken traveled around

61 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiueh an*, 16, p. 337.

in the 1520s to expound to large audiences his activist version of how to be a sage, but when, in 1522, he had gone to Peking in the carriage of a sage and dressed as a sage (or so he thought), he was discouraged by Ou-yang Te and turned back by a letter from Wang Yang-ming.⁶² The newly introduced concept of innate knowing was controversial as a further deviation from the state-sanctioned interpretations of Chu Hsi, and criticisms of Wang Yang-ming were mounting just as the new emperor was destabilizing politics at the court. Up to his death in 1529, Wang's influence remained primarily concentrated in Chekiang and Kiangsi. In the 1530s, Lü Nan, the defender of Chu Hsi's version of the Learning of the Way, organized large-scale meetings for discourses on learning in Nanking, where he served in high offices from 1527 to 1535 and 1536 to 1539. Tsou Shou-i joined Lü Nan in the discourses, as did Chan Jo-shui, who disputed the idea of "innate knowing" as interpreted by Wang's disciples. Wang Yang-ming's ideas provoked discussion, but they did not immediately sweep old thinking away at the southern capital, and they were not much publicized in the northern capital. In the 1540s, when disciples such as Tsou Shou-i, Ch'ien Te-hung, and Wang Chi were out of office and devoting themselves to discourses on learning, they toured mainly in the southern provinces. Serving as an official, Ou-yang Te's role was to foster open discussion of Wang Yang-ming's ideas about innate knowing in Peking.

Ou-yang's appointments included leading positions in the Imperial Academy and the Hanlin Academy, but he avowedly took discourses on learning as his main task.⁶³ His greatest triumph came just before he died. In 1553–54, he, along with one of the Grand Secretaries and other prominent officials, organized an extended series of discourses on learning. The meetings were held at a Taoist temple, the Ling-chi kung, in Peking, and were attended by thousands of literati and officials. In retrospect, this was seen as an unprecedented event which was never matched in later years, although there were attempts.⁶⁴ Through the combination of such massively attended discourses and his high capital offices, Ou-yang Te more than the other disciples brought Wang Yang-ming's doctrine of innate knowing into the mainstream. According to Huang Tsung-hsi, "half the world called themselves disciples of Ou-yang Te."⁶⁵ Wang's teachings were never legitimated for the purposes of the examinations, but their acceptability among elite circles was obvious by the 1550s.

62 DMB, p. 1383.

63 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 17, p. 360. See Ching, *Records*, p. 123.

64 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 17, p. 360. See Ching, *Records*, p. 123. *MS*, 273, p. 7277, gives the same assessment.

65 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 17, p. 360. See Ching, *Records*, p. 123, whose translation is adapted.

Discourses and dissent: the next generations

One of the literati who heard the discourses on learning in 1553 was Lo Ju-fang (1515–88), who was in Peking to complete the *chin-shih* examination that spring. Lo was one of the next generation of disciples – men born after 1510 who did not meet Wang Yang-ming themselves, but who were attracted to his ideas. From Nan-ch'eng in Chi-an prefecture, Kiangsi, Lo Ju-fang, as a young man, had sought to achieve purity in himself by controlling his desires and rectifying his heart.⁶⁶ Such was the advice still being taught by followers of Hsüeh Hsüan (1389–1464) as requisite to the Learning of the Way.⁶⁷ For his efforts Lo only made himself ill. After he had failed in 1540 in his first attempt at the provincial examination, he happened to see a sign board at a Buddhist temple which advertised, “First aid for mental disorders” (*chi chiu hsin huo*).⁶⁸ Thinking there was an accomplished physician within, Lo inquired and discovered it was Yen Chün discoursing on learning.

Yen Chün was not a literatus. Both a contemporary critic (Wang Shih-chen) and a contemporary admirer (Lo Ju-fang) commented that Yen had some difficulties in reading.⁶⁹ Yen Chün was lecturing on Wang Ken's interpretation of innate knowing at least by 1540, when Lo Ju-fang heard him. Yen argued that as our nature (*hsing*) is as perfect as a pearl, we should discard the negative, constrictive prescriptions for cultivation of our persons (*shen*) and do what is spontaneous (*tz'u jan*) to us. According to Yen Chün, “What need is there for ‘caution’ or ‘apprehension’ when one sees or hears something? . . . The perceptual knowledge, the principles, and the norms of earlier Confucians serve only to obstruct the Way.”⁷⁰ Yen Chün said he had disciples who discussed following one's nature, or mind, but most only talked of following one's sentiments (*ch'ing*). Through such emphases the latter term in the late Ming was to acquire new significance. His teachings also attracted to Yen what some of his critics thought was an unsavory type of follower.⁷¹

The cure that Yen Chün prescribed for Lo was recognition that his illness came from his intense struggle to control his desires (*yü*) – a struggle that

66 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiueh an*, 34, p. 760. See the discussions of Lo Ju-fang in Joanna F. Handlin, *Action in Ming thought: The reorientation of Lü K'un and other scholar-officials* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 37–54, and in DMB. Both list the main sources on Lo Ju-fang.

67 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiueh an*, 8, p. 155, under Yang Ying-shao.

68 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiueh an*, 34, p. 760. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 186. Also see Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsiü i'an chih ch'üan* (late Ming; rpt. Taipei, n.d.), B, pp. 48a–b.

69 Quoted in Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang i'ung shih*, Vol. 4B, p. 999.

70 Slightly altered from the trans. in *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 179, quoting Huang Tsung-hsi on Yen Chün in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiueh an*, 32, p. 703. Also see Ching, *Records*, pp. 165–66.

71 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiueh an*, 32, pp. 703–4. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 165–66. Also Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang i'ung shih*, Vol. 4B, p. 999; and *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, pp. 178–79 and 250.

was needless because moral capacity was already within him and that he need not, therefore, try to impose it from the outside. Thus released, Lo Ju-fang declared himself Yen's disciple and, at the next opportunity (1543), passed the provincial examination.⁷² The following spring, Lo went to Peking for the metropolitan examination.⁷³ He passed, but his illness may have recurred, for he did not go to the confirming palace examination. Instead, Lo went home and devoted himself to implementing the teachings stemming from Wang Ken by studying, lecturing, and doing charitable works. He finally returned to Peking in 1553, passed the palace examination and, as a new *chin-shih*, accepted an appointment as county magistrate in Nan Chih-li. For more than a decade, he served in various provincial and capital offices and, in the meanwhile, built a reputation as a teacher and lecturer.⁷⁴ When Lo Ju-fang was back in Peking in 1565, he was urging a leading grand secretary's sponsorship for further sessions of discourses on learning at the Ling-chi Temple.⁷⁵

Lo Ju-fang's reputation as a lecturer who expounded the idea of finding moral strength within one's heart was enhanced by his efforts on behalf of Yen Chün in 1568. Yen was jailed in Nanking and threatened with execution for offending a high ranking official; he remained defiant and endured a flogging of fifty strokes without pleading for mercy.⁷⁶ On learning that Yen Chün was in prison and his life at risk, Lo Ju-fang put himself at expense and risk in going to Nanking to assist him, which he continued to do even after Yen was released.⁷⁷ Lo remained at home in 1569–71 to mourn for his mother. In 1572 he began to travel and address large audiences of literati. Huang Tsung-hsi recorded that Lo Ju-fang was verbally so effective that he could quickly open the hearts of even literati with little learning so that the true Way was right before their eyes and all their superficiality and conventionality from Chu Hsi's teachings (*li hsüeh*) was washed away.⁷⁸ North to

72 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'üan*, B, p. 48b. Cf. Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, pp. 760–61; and Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, p. 39.

73 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'üan*, B, p. 49a. Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t' ung shih*, p. 1002, paraphrasing *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 761, suggested Lo did not go to the palace examination because he went to attend an imprisoned Yen Chün for six years. Huang Tsung-hsi seems to have mistaken information, and I follow Ts'ao in dating Lo Ju-fang's rescue of Yen to 1568. This is also the date used by Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, p. 51. Ching in *DMB*, p. 976, seems to place Yen Chün's arrest in Peking rather than Nanking, and in 1565 or 1566.

74 Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, pp. 39–41. Also Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 804.

75 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'üan*, B, p. 56a. See Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, p. 43.

76 Wang Shih-chen, *Yen-chou shih liao, bou chi*, 35, "Chia Lung Chiang hu ta-hsia," quoted in Hou, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t' ung shih*, p. 999.

77 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'üan*, B, p. 58a. See the discussions of Lo Ju-fang in Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, pp. 37–54, and in *DMB*. Both list the main sources on Lo Ju-fang.

78 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 762. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 188. Also see Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, p. 42.

Shantung, south to Kwangtung, west to Hu-kuang, east along the River to Nanking and Yang-chou, Lo lectured and directly influenced an important segment of the next two generations of intellectuals: the likes of Keng Ting-hsiang and Li Chih, Kuan Chih-tao and Chou Ju-teng.⁷⁹ Toward the end of his life Lo reflected that over the fifty or so years of his involvement with official circles, he had seen laws, punishments, and suffering only increase; they were not the means to a better society. He saw that the government's task lay not in abandoning criminals and others as no good, but in seeking to bring out the good that is in all people.⁸⁰ Lo seems to have found discourses on learning as the most effective means to this end. Even in the last year of his life he was making plans to go to Nanking for a massive meeting of literati.⁸¹

The political dimension of discourses on learning was clear. Lo Ju-fang wrote that he had raised, with the governor of Kiangsi, the idea of having a meeting encompassing the whole province, and that the provincial commissioner for education also supported the proposal. The local officials had discussed having the meeting at a Buddhist temple in Nan-ch'ang, the provincial capital. But when Lo returned up-river from Nan-ch'ang to his prefectural capital, Chi-an, officials there decided that it would be "inconvenient" to hold the meeting at the capital. Instead, officials, literati, and high-minded recluses from all over Kiangsi were to assemble the next spring in what was described as the out-of-the-way district of Yung-feng in the north-east of Chi-an prefecture.⁸² Thus, officials at different levels of government, and literati outside of government, vied for control of assemblies to discourse on learning.

The political implications of organizing assemblies of officials and potential officials nevertheless were real. To be recognized as a teacher or master by participants in such assemblies meant one had a certain influence over the disciples which could be used for political aggrandizement as well as moral transformation. Lo Ju-fang told a dozen or so of his followers that, just as with his learning he had inspired ten friends (meaning the ones with whom he was then conversing), they could, in turn, each inspire ten more, and each of the hundred could inspire ten more, and so on, until hundreds of thousands were implementing the teachings of Lo Ju-fang.⁸³ Regardless of its naïveté, this was a political dream.

79 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih chüan*, B, pp. 39a-b; and Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, pp. 43-45. Cf. Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsiieh an*, 34, p. 783.

80 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsiieh an*, 34, p. 780.

81 Li Chih, *Fen shu* (1590; rpt. Peking, 1961), 3, p. 123.

82 Quoted in Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu hsiang t' ung-shih*, Vol. 4B, pp. 1000-01, from Lo Ju-fang, *Chin-bi-tzu wen-chi*, ch. 5, "Chien ho sheng t' ung chih."

83 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih chüan*, B, p. 27b. Also cited in Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, p. 46.

The core of Lo Ju-fang's teaching was that we need to regain the innate mind of an innocent baby without effort, or intentionally striving, or learning; that mind is already there in our heart, which has in it the principles of heaven (*t'ien li*).⁸⁴ Lo gave the example of an infant nursed by his loving mother; he is composed and drinking, and it is so without his consciously knowing it.⁸⁵ Lo told his disciples that, while he was still young, he had realized that the intense feelings of love of one's own family and of fellowship with one's friends which he had experienced without effort were precisely the path to being a good person as taught in the Four Books but obfuscated by so many commentators.⁸⁶ This message was simpler and less embedded in scholarly erudition than Wang Yang-ming's. It also seems even closer to Ch'an Buddhism, a proximity which many observers recognized. Although he was familiar with Buddhist teachings, Lo and his followers insisted his teachings were not those of Buddhism. The anecdote was told that, to stop his grandson from reading the *Chung-feng kuang lu* by the Yüan monk called Ming-pen, Lo told him, "The theories of the Ch'an Buddhists cause men to drop out. Becoming involved with them is like falling into a well. Only one or two of a hundred men can afterwards change their minds and come back to the learning of the sages."⁸⁷ Lo and his teachers and followers were wary of crossing an ill-defined boundary which marked the learning of the literati. Perhaps to head off criticism, Lo Ju-fang cited and lectured on the Six Sacred Instructions of the founding Ming emperor, a text of unquestionable legitimacy and relevance for all literati, including officials.⁸⁸ Regardless of any similarity or influence, Lo was not a Buddhist.

His contemporary from Kiangsi, Hu Chih (1517–85), left writings and a reputation that were strongly Buddhist,⁸⁹ but Hu's intellectual quest led him through many twists. Although his father had been a follower of Wang Yang-ming, Hu Chih was not interested, but in Kiangsi he could not avoid the milieu of Wang's ideas. Hu made an important change in the early 1540s when he accepted Ou-yang Te's guidance as his teacher and in 1543 passed the provincial examination. His involvement with Wang's ideas led him to another Kiangsi disciple, Lo Hung-hsien (1504–64). Lo was critical of the

84 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 762. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 188.

85 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 764.

86 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 790. Trans. in Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 129–30.

87 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 762. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 189. Also see the entry for Lo Ju-fang in DMB. In Ku Hsien-ch'eng's comment on Lo in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 58, p. 1389, Lo is reported to have scolded his son for reading a Buddhist book.

88 E.g., see Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'ian*, B, p. 52a, and B, p. 18a. See DMB, p. 977, and Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, p. 50.

89 See DMB, pp. 624–5; Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 22, pp. 512–13, and Ching, *Records*, pp. 136–38; and Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 206–18.

gatherings for discourses on learning, had doubts about some of Wang Yang-ming's doctrines, and instead emphasized self-abnegation and sitting in meditation.⁹⁰ Accepting instruction from Lo in 1547, Hu Chih began his most Buddhistic phase.

By his own later account, Hu engaged in intensive meditation to transcend his inner turmoils. After six months, he came to a sudden realization. "I now know that the ten thousand things of heaven-and-earth are not external [to my mind]."⁹¹ This insight was eventually reformulated as Hu Chih's claim that "My mind is that which makes the ten thousand things of heaven-and-earth."⁹² This extreme idealism is usually interpreted as Buddhist in its implications, and Hu Chih therefore is often presumed to be Buddhist,⁹³ even though Hu declared he found Confucian classical precedents for the idea. During this phase, Hu gave some thought to retiring from the world to be a monk, but he continued working on the classical texts and preparing for the examinations.⁹⁴ In the spring of 1553, Hu Chih was among those in Peking for the *chin-shih* examinations, which he failed. This rattled his confidence in the self-centered equanimity he thought he had achieved through meditating. He was shaken even more when, the next year, he heard that his early mentor, Ou-yang Te, had died.⁹⁵

Hu Chih was moved to turn again. He found within himself a new commitment to the sages of antiquity as his model, to the necessity of coupling action in daily life with moral understanding (as Wang Yang-ming had taught), and to the inadequacies of then current interpretations of both Chu Hsi's and Wang Yang-ming's teachings. Hu pointed out that Confucius had taught his disciples about being respectful sons and younger brothers; he never taught anyone about exhaustively investigating the coherence of things.⁹⁶ Hu also worried that his contemporaries following Wang Yang-ming were placing too much reliance on the internal aspects of moral self-development to the exclusion of what they disparaged as external aspects, particularly ritual; Hu Chih sought to restore Confucius' teaching about using rituals to regulate one's personal conduct and using broad experience to enhance one's learning.⁹⁷ Hu returned to participating in learned discussions with other literati,

90 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 22, p. 521 (K'un hsüeh chi); also 18, pp. 388–89. See Ching, *Records*, p. 134.

91 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 22, p. 521 (K'un hsüeh chi). Also see Rodney Taylor, "Journey into self: The autobiographical reflections of Hu Chih," *History of Religions*, 21.4 (1982), p. 330.

92 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 22, p. 513. See Ching, *Records*, p. 137.

93 E.g., Jung, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 208–211.

94 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 22, p. 522.

95 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 22, p. 523.

96 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 22, p. 524.

97 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 22, p. 525.

and, in 1556, he passed the *chin-shih* examination and began his career as an official in the provinces.⁹⁸

Although Hu Chih was not known for involvement in the fashionable discourses on learning, he attracted notice for his attempts to rejoin the moral vision based on one's own mind, nature, and innate knowing with one's obligation to serve in this world. In this sense, Hu ended up in a less Buddhist place than Lo Ju-fang, yet the political implications of his ideas (and his connections) were as disturbing to defenders of traditional authority. In an interview prior to Lo's assignment to a new post in 1573, Chang Chü-cheng asked him where Hu Chih was serving. Hu was completing a term as administrative vice commissioner in Kwangsi, and Lo said Hu had just written in a letter that he would be returning soon to Peking. (As it turned out, Hu Chih was sent back to Kwangsi to be a surveillance commissioner, but instead he resigned and went home to Kiangsi for ten years to work on his philosophical and autobiographical writings.)⁹⁹ Chang Chü-cheng could be as wary of low-ranking Lo Ju-fang's and Hu Chih's growing reputations in discourses on learning and moral stance as he was of fellow grand secretary Hsü Chieh's lecturing at the Ling-chi Temple in Peking. It was speculated that because Chang Chü-cheng did not want Lo in Peking at the same time as Hu Chih, in 1573 Lo was sent out to serve as magistrate in a county in Shantung and then transferred to remote province of Yunnan.¹⁰⁰ After a full term in office in Yunnan, Lo Ju-fang resigned in 1577, partly at the instigation of Chang Chü-cheng, who threatened to send him back to Yunnan.¹⁰¹ That year, 1577, Lo's discourses on learning at the Kuang-hui Temple in Peking were attended by many officials, to the grand secretary's chagrin.¹⁰² Lo continued to travel and give discourses on learning before audiences of hundreds and thousands of men.¹⁰³ Lo was not intimidated by Chang Chü-cheng's attempts to suppress discourses on learning. Someone asked him if he were not fearful of being charged with conspiracy if he continued. Lo replied that literati who sought fame by engaging in discourses might come to grief, but not someone, like Lo himself, who did so with a sincere heart.¹⁰⁴

Lo Ju-fang's widespread success in the 1570s and 1580s can be interpreted as a high point in the dissemination of the idea of innate knowing. Chiao Hung, who knew and respected Lo, made a penetrating judgement: Lo devel-

98 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 22, p. 526.

99 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'üan*, B, p. 60b. Jung, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 207. The *K'un hsüeh chi* was dated by Hu as written in 1573, when he was out of office.

100 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'üan*, B, p. 60b. Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, p. 43.

101 This is implied in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 806, under Yang Ch'i-yüan.

102 Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung-shih*, 1097.

103 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'üan*, B, pp. 77a-78b. Handlin, *Action in Ming thought*, pp. 42-44.

104 Ts'ao Yin-ju, *Hsü t' an chih ch'üan*, B, pp. 75b-76a.

oped the teachings of Wang Yang-ming and Wang Ken to the extent that there was nothing further to unravel.¹⁰⁵ But it should be noticed that Lo Ju-fang participated in shifting the locus of efforts at being moral away from just doing it, as he himself had in his devotion to Yen Chün, to discoursing about it in his meetings with literati.

Another literatus influenced by Yen Chün who, with a less sincere heart, ran into political troubles is Liang Ju-yüan (1517–79), better known under the alias Ho Hsin-yin. He was born in Chi-an prefecture, Kiangsi, as were Yen Chün and Lo Ju-fang.¹⁰⁶ He was thirty when he passed as the top ranked candidate of the provincial examination, but then he met Yen Chün and did not seek further examination success or official appointment. As Yen Chün's disciple from 1546, Liang/Ho had a career which tended to polarize his contemporaries as well as later historians. For several years from 1553 Liang Ju-yüan sought to organize the Liang lineage and others in his home district of Yung-feng on rather idealistic lines which he hoped would eventually replace selfish personal or household interests, including ownership of land, with a concern for a larger collectivity, of which Liang himself was to be the leader. Such a stance made him an attractive figure for Marxist historians,¹⁰⁷ but it generated conflict with clan leaders and local officials. He sought to interpose his new "collective harmony" (*chü ho*) organization between its constituents and tax collectors. After an incident in 1559, Liang Ju-yüan was arrested and sentenced to death, which then was commuted to banishment. The intervention of someone on the staff of the supreme commander of Hukuang province saved him, and Liang left Kiangsi to go north to try his luck in Peking. At the capital in 1560–61 he met Lo Ju-fang and others involved in discourses. He managed to attract the animosity of the formidable Grand Secretary, Yen Sung, and Liang Ju-yüan fled to Nanking. He thenceforth traveled under the name of Ho Hsin-yin.¹⁰⁸

For nearly twenty years Ho Hsin-yin traveled and engaged in discourses on learning, which was interpreted as a moral activity.¹⁰⁹ Like Lo Ju-fang, Ho was effective in drawing large crowds as well as devoted supporters. He sought to extend the application of the word family (*chia*) to be applicable to

105 Chiao Hung, *Tan-yüan chi*, 20, p. 12a; quoted in Edward Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung and the restructuring of neo-Confucianism in late Ming* (New York, 1986), p. 38.

106 *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 234, lists the main primary and secondary materials on Ho Hsin-yin and gives a good account of him, pp. 178–88. DMB, pp. 513–15; and Ronald Dimberg, *The sage and society: The life and thought of Ho Hsin-yin* (Honolulu, 1974).

107 See preface to *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu (Peking, 1960), pp. 1–2, and Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang i'ung-shih*, Vol. 4B, pp. 1018–19. Cf. *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, pp. 70–72.

108 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingjuhsüeh-shan*, 32, p. 705. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 167. See also *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu (Peking, 1960), p. 95.

109 A chronological account of Ho Hsin-yin's activities during these years is in Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang i'ung-shih*, Vol. 4B, pp. 1006–08, 1010–11.

all collectivities (e.g., the “family” of friends and the “family” of autonomous nations), so that the whole empire, which would include all-under-heaven, should also be one family. For Ho, the word friendship (*yu*) was to be extended to refer to the best in a wide range of human relationships; his usage was close to what in English was implied by fellowship.¹¹⁰ In stressing these ideas of integration and unity, Ho Hsin-yin was addressing the increased awareness in the late sixteenth century of the divisiveness and disunity which prevailed in the political, social and intellectual realms. Ho was criticized for slighting the other, hierarchical relationships in his lopsided interpretation of fellowship as the essential aspect of being a teacher, a friend, an accomplished man, and a sage.¹¹¹ Ho Hsin-yin’s message was welcomed by literati who were organizing themselves into peer-group networks which stood in need of ideological props in a society and political system which took father-son, not friend-friend, as the archetypal relationship.

Ho Hsin-yin also made grand claims for the practice of discoursing on learning. He puffed it up to be *the* essential activity, the model for which was set by the sages Yao and Shun and especially Confucius. Confucius, the teacher, being more important than any ruler, Ho argued, demonstrates the importance of the task Ho, Lo Ju-fang, and others were undertaking: to convey the Way to others so as to reorder society, which implicitly was being ill served by established leaders.¹¹² Again, Ho’s message was welcomed by those engaged in such activities, but its arrogance irritated some officials who accepted the premise that the imperial government, in which they participated, if not the emperor himself, had the privilege of determining where the Way lies; it was not up to some itinerant rabble rousers. A few years after Ho died in prison, an admirer wrote a commemoration which explicitly blamed his death on his discourses on learning.¹¹³

Ho Hsin-yin had periodically spent time in Hsiao-kan, a county in Hukuang province. When he was there in 1576 to discourse on learning, his arrest as a rebel was ordered by the governor. Forewarned, Ho evaded the

110 See *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, p. 28; Hou, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t’ung shih*, p. 1023; and Dimberg, *The Sage and society*, pp. 80 and 86.

111 Cited by Li Chih as quoted in *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, p. 11. Cf. *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 186.

112 Ho Hsin-yin, “Yüan Chiang, yüan hsüeh,” in *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, pp. 1–25. This essay is discussed in Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t’ung shih*, pp. 1013–16; *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, pp. 185–86; Dimberg, *The sage and society*, pp. 87–101. Hou, p. 1006, and Dimberg, p. 52, date this essay to 1579, between Chang Chü-cheng’s order to suppress private academies and discourses on learning and Ho’s death in prison later that year.

113 Ch’eng Hsüeh-po, “Chi Liang Fu-shan hsien-sheng wen,” in *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, pp. 135–37. Ch’eng, who had repeatedly helped Ho Hsin-yin, wrote his commemoration in Yunnan, where he was a surveillance vice commissioner (*fu-shih*), in 1584, after the death and disgrace of Chang Chü-cheng.

authorities for more than two years, but early in 1579 he was caught in Ch'i-men in Nan Chihli near the Kiangsi border. He was returned to the capital of Hu-kuang and died later that year from the flogging administered in prison.¹¹⁴ The motives for his arrest and the responsibility for his death have remained controversial. One contemporary version had it that as he was being beaten, Ho Hsin-yin insisted it was Chang Chü-cheng who was killing him, in accord with the prophecy he supposedly made after they met nearly twenty years earlier.¹¹⁵ Another version suggested that Chang Chü-cheng may not have ordered Ho's arrest and death, but it had been instigated to please the Grand Secretary by officials in Hu-kuang, which was Chang's home province.¹¹⁶ Still another version had it that Ho's death was due to rivalry between the family of his patrons in Hsiao-kan and the governor.¹¹⁷ Regardless of who was responsible for it, Ho's death served to make the point that discourses on learning had serious political implications. Some years later, Li Chih pointed out that after his arrest, as Ho Hsin-yin was being taken back more than 3000 *li* to the prison where he was to die in Wu-ch'ang, everywhere along the route the injustice of his arrest was recognized. The accounts of Ho Hsin-yin facing his imminent death with brave defiance were intended to rally the literati against the government. The authorities, however, condemned Ho as a rebel.¹¹⁸

Ho was a rebel, all legal considerations aside. Ho Hsin-yin's audience, like Yen Chün's and Lo Ju-fang's, was primarily composed of literati, including many lower and middle level officials, and was centered in Chiang-nan. Like Yen Chün, Ho must have been a fascinating person, and his appeal lay in an unconventional, energizing, liberating message, which simultaneously was a major source of the criticism against him. Yen Chün and Ho Hsin-yin were not bridled in words or conduct by the traditions of literati learning, as Huang Tsung-hsi pointed out.¹¹⁹ Ho Hsin-yin's death in 1579 served as a lesson, for those who would learn it, that unrestrained expression of the sentiments in one's heart was socially disruptive. The concept of innate knowing independent of authority had been acted out to a logical extreme by Ho Hsin-yin.

114 I follow the account in *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, p. 5.

115 *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, p. 138 and p. 144, quoting Shen Te-fu and Wang Shih-chen. Also Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsueh an*, 32, p. 704. Cf. Dimberg, *The sage and society*, pp. 52–54.

116 Li Chih, *Fen shu*, p. 93. Also Tsou Yüan-piao, quoted in *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, p. 121. *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 181, and Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1008, subscribe to this version.

117 *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, p. 142, quoting Keng Ting-li.

118 Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1011.

119 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsueh an*, 32, p. 704. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 166. Also *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 179.

Discourses on learning functioned as a means of building networks of literati outside of government control and outside established hierarchies of authority. In the 1570s, Wang Yang-ming's personal disciples, Ch'ien Tchung and Wang Chi, as well as latter followers, such as Lo Ju-fang and Ho Hsin-yin, were engaged in discourses which attracted large crowds in Chiang-nan and elsewhere, where they built up coteries of followers and sympathizers. Huang Tsung-hsi wrote that such activities could be called mutual promotion.¹²⁰ They represent the newly enhanced possibilities of using discourses on moral philosophy as a means of systematically mobilizing literati opinion on a nonlocal basis against government leaders. This was to become an endemic problem for those leaders in late Ming. Ho's contemporary, Wang Shih-chen, supplied a hint of what the thinking was. With Yen Chün and Ho Hsin-yin in mind, Wang wrote that they had almost caused the dynasty to come to grief, as had the Yellow Turbans and Five Pecks of Grain organizations at the fall of the Han dynasty.¹²¹ Imperial governments had continued to redirect, subvert or repress religious organizations, usually involving persons with little or no literacy. Uncontrolled literati organizations were more threatening. Thus the stories about Chang Chü-cheng being responsible for Ho Hsin-yin's death in 1579 have a certain truth to them, a truth re-enforced by Chang's ordering the closing of private academies in 1579 as part of his repeated efforts to discourage large gatherings for discourses on learning.¹²²

In the 1570s, Chang Chü-cheng (1525–82) was the most serious opponent confronting the various followers of Wang Yang-ming's teachings. As the leading Grand Secretary for a decade, he was their most highly placed political opponent, and he used his power against individuals (such as Lo Ju-fang, Hu Chih, and perhaps Ho Hsin-yin) and against institutions (such as the large meetings for discourses on learning and the privately established academies which were alternatives to state-sponsored educational establishments). In his writings Chang advanced a well-precedented intellectual position – relying on pragmatic expedience in making government decisions – to counter the fashionable preoccupation with the cultivation of moral purity based on one's own innate knowing. Every aspect of Chang's reputation was sullied after his death, but at least until 1577 his was an important voice in the struggles over literati values.

120 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 58, p. 1375. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 223.

121 In *Ho Hsin-yin chi*, ed. Jung Chao-tsu, p. 143. Also quoted in Hou, *Chung-kuo ssu hsiang t'ung shih*, pp. 1003 and 1011–12. Trans. in *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 178. In this regard, the rumor that Ho was organizing a kind of secret society has added significance. See Hou, p. 1029.

122 *Shen-tsung shih lu*, 83 (Wan-li 7, first month), quoted in Hou, *Chung-kuo ssu hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1098.

The later criticisms of him notwithstanding, Chang Chü-cheng had a spectacular career as a literatus. He passed the provincial examination in Hukuang in 1540 in his sixteenth year. Although he failed the metropolitan examination in 1544, he was still an unusually young man when he passed on his next attempt three years later, ranked ninth in the second class.¹²³ Assigned to the Hanlin Academy, he served there almost continuously for seven years until he resigned in 1554 on a plea of illness.¹²⁴ When he returned to office in 1560 at the urging of his father, he was appointed to the Imperial Academy. He held posts there or in the Hanlin Academy through 1567, when he was made a grand secretary.¹²⁵ Chang was a creature of court politics; he never held administrative responsibilities away from the capital.

In part, Chang Chü-cheng's rapid rise was due to his securing the patronage of Hsü Chieh (1503–83), a Grand Secretary from 1552 until 1568.¹²⁶ In contrast to Chang, Hsü Chieh was supportive of new interpretations of the Learning of the Way. While he was in disfavor at the capital during the 1530s, Hsü served in the provinces and built a reputation among the literati. He was friendly with some of Wang Yang-ming's leading students, and prominently participated in discourses on learning at the capital in 1553–54 and later.¹²⁷ He became, in effect, a proponent of the new teachings at the highest official level. One might cynically say that Hsü played the game of lofty moral inquiry to the general satisfaction of his literati audience. Most of them did not seem to mind that through his son he gained control of huge amounts of land in his home prefecture, Sung-chiang. They knew Hsü had seized the occasion of the Chia-ching Emperor's death in 1567 to draft a final imperial order against the continuation of abuses which Hsü had previously condoned.¹²⁸ After he retired, when he was criticized for avarice by Hai Jui and again attacked by his old rival Kao Kung, Hsü did not suffer the animosity directed at Chang Chü-cheng. Huang Tsung-hsi pointed out that Hsü Chieh's contemporaries praised his achievements and thought that he must understand the Way because he engaged in discourses on learning. They were deceived, or deceiving, in Huang's judgement; Hsü followed expedient means and did not conduct himself as Hu Chü-jen had said a true Confucian (*ju*) would: not to use clever stratagems, but only to be in accord

123 Yang To, *Chang Chiang-ling nien-p'u* (Shanghai, 1938), pp. 5–6. See *Kuo-ch'ao li-k'o t'i-i-ming pei-lu ch'u-chi*, *Ming Ch'ing li k'o chin-shih t'i-i-ming pei-lu*, ed. Li Chou-wang (Taipei, 1969), p. 767.

124 Yang To, *Chang Chiang-ling nien-p'u*, p. 17.

125 Yang To, *Chang Chiang-ling nien-p'u*, p. 27.

126 DMB, pp. 573–74; Chi Wen-fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun* (Chungking, 1944), p. 55. Chang also secured the patronage of Kao Kung (1512–78), a Grand Secretary in 1566–67 and Hsü Chieh's rival.

127 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 27, p. 618.

128 DMB, p. 574. Cf. Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, p. 618, Huang's final comment on Hsü Chieh.

with the coherence of heaven (*t'ien-li*) in one's conduct of government affairs.¹²⁹

Chang Chü-cheng may well have been a more effective administrator and a more fastidiously moral man than Hsü Chieh. Why then, the vitriolic hatred directed against Chang? The motives of his critics were personal, financial (e.g., his tax reforms were directed in part at the locally powerful who had the most success at evasion), political, and more, but it is important to recognize that Chang Chü-cheng was presenting to the literati an alternative to the Learning of the Way. He wrote extensively to justify his approach to political action according to his credo: "If it is to the benefit of the state, I would do it regardless of life or death."¹³⁰ He took the virtually unassailable position of aligning himself with the policies and practices of the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty, who "followed the times to regulate their suitability and established the administration to fit the people."¹³¹ There was no higher political authority for emperors of the Ming dynasty. Chang repeatedly said the later dynasties and emperors, notably Ming T'ai-tsu, should be our guides, not the sage rulers of ancient times. When he was the chief examiner for the 1571 metropolitan examinations, he set as the theme for one of the essays the problem of modeling on the later rulers, which had been advocated by Hsün Tzu, or modeling on the early rulers, which was a position ascribed to Mencius.¹³² Chang's discussion of this problem made his disposition clear, and literati who hoped to advance while he was Grand Secretary could not help but notice. He considered Chu Hsi's interpretation of the goal of "abiding in the highest good" implied being unchanging rather than being flexibly in the middle, and thus, Chang found it an impractical ideal.¹³³ In his own commentary on the Four Books, Chang adopted Chu Hsi's position that we can accumulate knowledge by means of the investigation of things rather than Wang Yang-ming's that we can intuitively fathom coherence in our hearts, not in external things.¹³⁴ Chang's ethic was not subjective, although clearly he had self-confidence in his ideas and actions. His justification consistently came back to pragmatic, or expedient, action for the good of the imperial state in particular and for the people at large. "In making decisions, I may not agree with prevailing customs but the essential

129 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 27, p. 618.

130 As trans. in Robert Crawford, "Chang Chü-cheng's Confucian Legalism," in *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, p. 368.

131 As trans. in Crawford, "Chang's Confucian legalism," p. 372.

132 Chang Chü-cheng, *Chang T'ai-yueh chi* (1612; facsimile rpt. Shanghai, 1984), 16, p. 7b (p. 192). Also cited in Chi Wen-fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun*, p. 50. See Yang To, *Chang Chiang-ling nien-p'u*, p. 43.

133 Crawford, "Chang's Confucian Legalism," p. 378. Cf. Chang Chü-cheng, *Chang T'ai-yueh chi*, 18, p. 1b (p. 208).

134 Crawford, "Chang's Confucian legalism," p. 399.

thing is my desire to fulfill my motive of acting for the state and being a literatus-official.”¹³⁵

Chang Chü-cheng's claim to be pursuing the state's interest, not his own advantage, justified his intolerance of literati and officials who devoted themselves to discourses on morality rather than participating in administering the empire. The literati who remained out of office to devote themselves to meditation and discourses on learning were irresponsible idlers, not moral exemplars. Chang wrote, “It is, in fact, a big lie when others erroneously say I do not like discourses on learning. How could my assistance to our illustrious ruler deviate in a single word or deed from the Way of Yao and Shun, the Duke of Chou and Confucius? But in all that I do, I want to carry it out personally and vigorously, so I consider that those involved in the empty chatter [of discourses on learning] are not to be condoned.”¹³⁶ Of course, this was an expedient argument. Chang did not approve of discourses on learning and, in 1579, tried to restrain them by shutting down academies.

Because of his attacks on Wang Yang-ming's followers and his advocacy of expedience, Chang was fiercely counter-attacked when the chance came. In the ninth month of 1577, his father died. Chang Chü-cheng had been a grand secretary for ten years and the leading grand secretary since the young Wan-li emperor had come to the throne in 1572. When the news of his father's death reached Peking, Chang did the normal and the morally proper thing: he sought permission to resign from all his concurrent posts to return home to mourn his father for the required twenty-seven months. But the decision was made that it was not expedient for him to do so. Various reasons are given. Plans were underway for the emperor's wedding the next spring and he thought Chang was indispensable until then. Chang's allies and partisans at the capital pressed him to stay on out of concern about their own roles if he were replaced. It was speculated that Chang himself worried that if he were out of politics for the mourning period he might not return with his powers intact.¹³⁷ Some commentators have suggested Chang was sincere in his requests to leave office to enter mourning. It is generally agreed, however, that he dominated the young emperor, and, on the face of it, if Chang had sincerely wanted to return home for the full mourning period, he could have arranged it so that the emperor would have been compelled to assent. After the three memorials Chang submitted urging that he be allowed to

135 Slightly altered from translation in Crawford, “Chang's Confucian legalism,” p. 403.

136 Chang Chü-cheng, *Chang T'ai-yüeh chi*, 30, pp. 162–b (p. 373). Also quoted in Chi Wen-fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun*, p. 48; partly trans. in Crawford, “Chang's Confucian Legalism,” p. 398.

137 For a summary of these reasons, see Yang To, *Chang Chiang-ling nien-p'u*, p. 55.

leave were not heeded by the emperor, Chang stayed in office with reduced commitments.¹³⁸

Whatever his reasons, Chang Chü-cheng was immediately and strenuously denounced for letting expedience come before moral standards. Following a flurry of memorials submitted by others, Tsou Yüan-piao presented one of his own denouncing Chang's claim that unusual (*fei-ch'ang*) circumstances sometimes required an unusual person to deal with them, even if that meant violating moral obligations that otherwise were constant (*ch'ang*). To counter this appeal to expedience, Tsou Yüan-piao cited the assertion from the *Analects* that someone who cannot correct (*cheng*) himself cannot properly govern (*cheng*) others. Even more pointed to the current controversy, Tsou cited the truism that a son who was not filial could never be trusted to be loyal to his emperor. Tsou even predicted his own punishment would result from Chang Chü-cheng's reliance on legalistic methods; Tsou suffered a beating of eighty strokes and then exile.¹³⁹ In the view of his critics, Chang was not properly mourning his father, which was a cardinal requirement of the ethical system. Thus Chang's integrity as an official and even as a literatus were called into question. The criticisms were temporarily staunch by beating critics at court, removing them from the capital, and threatening them with execution.¹⁴⁰ After his death in 1582, he was posthumously disgraced. No subsequent grand secretary attempted as Chang Chü-cheng had to check the appeal of the followers of Wang Yang-ming on intellectual grounds.

Advocates of discourses on learning and Buddhistic doctrines stemming from Wang Yang-ming survived Chang Chü-cheng. The last of Wang Yang-ming's direct disciples, Wang Chi, died in 1583, and leaders of the second generation of disciples, Hu Chih (d. 1585) and Lo Ju-fang (d. 1588), remained influential. Lo Ju-fang had venerated Yen Chün as a sage. In turn, Lo was considered to be a sage by Yang Ch'i-yüan (1547–99), at least according to the unsympathetic comment of Ku Hsien-ch'eng.¹⁴¹ Yang Ch'i-yüan was from Kwangtung and had grown up under the influence of his father's commitment to the teachings of Chan Jo-shui. Yang passed the provincial examination in 1567 and then failed in three attempts at the metropolitan examination. In the meantime, he heard about the teachings of Lo Ju-fang. When Yang succeeded in becoming a *chin-shih* in 1577, he also met Lo Ju-

138 Chang, *Chang T'ai-yüeh chi*, 41, pp. 12–32 (pp. 116–17).

139 Tsou Yüan-piao, memorial in *Ching-shih wen pien*, eds. Ch'en Tzu-lung et al. (1639; rpt. Peking, 1962), 445, pp. 5b, 6b and 7b (pp. 4891–892).

140 DMB, p. 54; Yang, *Chang Chiang-ling nien-p'u*, p. 55; Chu Tung-jun, *Chang Chü-cheng ta chuan* (1945; rpt. Taipei, 1968), p. 279.

141 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju tsüeh an*, 58, p. 1388. Also quoted in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju tsüeh an*, 34, p. 806, at the end of the account of Yang Ch'i-yüan. See Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1002, and DMB, p. 1505.

fang in Peking and declared himself a disciple. The view spread that Yang would not act without first gaining Lo's approval.¹⁴² After serving in various capital positions, Yang went in 1586 to visit Lo Ju-fang at his mountain retreat in Nan-ch'eng, Kiangsi. Because Lo was already quite elderly, Yang took it as his task to perpetuate his master's teachings. He helped in the preparation of the record of Lo's conversations and writings for publication. Yang also developed his own interpretation of luminous power (*ming te*) which has its source in heaven and which is inseparable from the perceptions and actions of our own physical selves. By emphasizing desires and perceptions, Yang furthered the obliteration of any significant conceptual distinction between our sentiments (*ch'ing*) and our moral natures (*hsing*),¹⁴³ a division which had been cardinal since Sung in the Learning of the Way. Yang's belief in teachings transmitted by the barely literate Wang Ken and Yen Chün enhanced their appeal because in the years immediately after Lo Ju-fang's death he received appointments as director of studies and later as chancellor of the Imperial Academy.¹⁴⁴ His influence was exerted from an authoritative position. Later critics identified Yang Ch'i-yüan as the one man responsible for the introduction of Ch'an Buddhist ideas into examination essays and thus for the further corrupting of Ch'eng-Chu teachings.¹⁴⁵

The Buddhistic interpretations of Wang Chi also continued to be propagated in the 1590s. Chou Ju-teng (1547–1629) had gone to nearby Shao-hsing in 1571 to hear Wang Chi discourse on learning and declared himself a follower. Later, probably in 1577 in Peking, Chou came under Lo Ju-fang's influence. Lo then suggested he carefully read the *Fa-yüan chu lin*, 120 *chüan* compiled by the T'ang monk, Tao-shih, and Chou began to revere Wang Chi. After passing the provincial examination in 1573, the *chin-shih* examinations in 1577, and accepting an appointment to office, Chou retired in 1581 and continued his efforts in moral philosophy. He was a declared follower of Lo Ju-fang, but also helped in the posthumous publication of a collection of Wang Chi's ideas. The year after Lo's death in 1588, Chou returned to office. While in the salt administration in T'ai-chou, Wang Ken's home prefecture, Chou paid homage to the memory of Wang Ken.¹⁴⁶

In Nanking in 1592, Chou Ju-teng participated in meetings there for discourses on learning which he organized with Yang Ch'i-yüan and Hsü Fu-yüan. He achieved some prominence for his arguments on behalf of Wang

142 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 806.

143 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, pp. 806 and 811.

144 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 34, p. 806. DMB, under Yang Ch'i-yüan.

145 Ai Nan-ying, quoted in Ku Yen-wu, *Jib chib lu chi shih*, 18.19a, "Chü yeh."

146 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 36, p. 854. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 199–200. Also see DMB, pp. 271–72, under Chou Ju-teng.

Chi, whose teachings he continued to promote, when they were raised as a topic for discussion at the Nanking meeting. Hsü Fu-yüan (1535–1604), a 1562 *chin-shih* from Hu-kuang, sought to dismiss any discussion of Wang Chi's negative interpretation of Wang Yang-ming's assertion that having no good and having no evil is mind-in-itself. Hsü wrote out and circulated nine arguments against Wang Chi. Chou Ju-teng responded with nine refutations, and their exchange was subsequently printed.¹⁴⁷ Among other points, Hsü Fu-yüan argued that Wang Chi's interpretation was not preceded in the classics and established commentaries, and that sages of antiquity (and Chu Hsi) had made every effort to show that the phenomenal world, its coherence, and the morality in our hearts are true and real; they exist. Wang Chi's teaching that the nonexistent heart, desires, knowing, and things were more real than the existing ones misled men into Buddhist thinking. In his refutations, Chou Ju-teng maintained that the doctrine of having no good and having no evil was clearly implicit in the classics and commentaries. Extending Wang Chi's teaching, Chou claimed that there is no good or evil, not even in our natures (*hsing*). He posited that the existence of evil was not logically necessary as it is not to be understood as merely the opposite or counterpart of the good to which the sages referred. The good (*shan*) in question for Chou was not ordinary, manifested good, but perfect goodness (*chih shan*), which only can be understood as having the ontological status of not existing (*wu*). If that is the status of good, it is superfluous to accord evil the status of existing (*yu*). These arguments were over concepts rather than words, and turned on assumptions rather than evidence.

Chou Ju-teng retired from office in 1597 and went to live in Shao-hsing. Promoting the veneration of Wang Yang-ming and Wang Chi in eastern Che-kiang, he also organized large banquets to commemorate the meeting in 1527 at which Wang Chi may or may not have secured Wang Yang-ming's approval of his interpretation of the four negative sentences. In retirement, Chou also compiled an anthology in eighteen *chüan* which he entitled *The Venerable Transmission of the Learning of Sages* (*Sheng hsüeh tsung ch'uan*). Starting with the sages of antiquity, Chou sought to show the line of teachings emphasizing innate knowing which attains perfect good (beyond the dichotomy of good and evil) ran through Wang Yang-ming and his main disciples. Wang Chi's doctrine of four negative sentences was cast as the most insightful interpretation, and which had been carried on by Lo Ju-fang. As Lo's follower, Chou Ju-teng was not only celebrating a particular line of Confucian learning,

¹⁴⁷ The exchange is included in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 36, pp. 861–68. See Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 36, p. 854, and Ching, *Records*, pp. 200 and 206; also Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 41, p. 976; DMB, p. 274; and Heinrich Busch, "The Tung-lin shu-yüan and its political and philosophical significance," *Monumenta Serica*, 14 (1949–55), p. 80.

he was using his book to establish that he himself was the heir carrying on that transmission. *The Venerable Transmission of the Learning of Sages* was in print by 1609, but Chou Ju-teng's influence remained centered in Shao-hsing as intellectual fashions were changing. Decades later, Huang Tsung-hsi cited Chou's book in the first sentence of the introduction to his own *Source Book of Ming Confucians*, but dismissed it as superficial, based on inadequate sources, and too partial to Ch'an Buddhism.¹⁴⁸

Commenting on Chou Ju-teng's interpretations, Huang Tsung-hsi identified a problem. Wang Yang-ming, to whose teachings Huang remained sympathetic and that he tried to save, had taught it was the heart-in-itself (*hsin-chih-t'i*) which has no good or evil. Chou Ju-teng's mistaken departure, according to Huang, was to think that our nature (*hsing*) not only has no evil but also has no good (*wu shan*). Some of Chou's contemporaries were concerned that views such as he advanced were eroding the foundation of morality. Denying that good is based or rooted in our nature seemed, in effect, to render nugatory the norms set by the sages Yao and Shun and to destroy the fundamental distinction between Buddhism and Confucian (*ju*) teachings.¹⁴⁹ Regardless of the philosophical merits of these arguments, they represent a developing sense by the late sixteenth century that arguments from nothingness (*wu*) were undermining moral certitude.

In late Ming, arguments for the capacity of the individual to discover and apprehend good and right within his own heart, for the validity of other interpretations in lieu of the established Ch'eng-Chu teachings, for expedience in politics, and for the inclusion of concepts from Buddhist and other texts and teachers, all combined to promote an openness to the other points of view. It was an environment amenable to a dramatic exponent of relativism, Li Chih.

Li Chih (1527–1602) has been subject to an inconclusive range of interpretations in part because, in my view, of his relativism. He was quite explicit: "Human judgments are not fixed quantities; in passing judgments [on others] men do not hold settled views."¹⁵⁰ Most commentators, however, have not applied that proposition when judging Li Chih himself. Li Chih's writings from after 1580 contain all manner of assertions which provide an evidentiary basis for claiming that he believed one thing or another, according to the predilections of the given reader. Li Chih has been labeled a Confucian, Buddhist, Legalist, iconoclast, progressive, nihilist, populist, individualist, and

148 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, "Fa-fan," p. 17. See Ching, *Records*, p. 45.

149 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 36, pp. 854–55. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 200–01.

150 Li Chih, "Ch'ien lun," *Ts'ang shu* (Nanking, 1599; rpt. Peking, 1959), p. 7, as trans. by K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 811.

more.¹⁵¹ His detractors have been as vehement as his admirers.¹⁵² My interpretation is that we cannot determine which particular assertion Li believed was true because, adopting a relativist position himself, he did not see a need to hold settled views.

Born in Fukien to a lineage that in earlier generations had been involved in overseas trade and Islamic religion, Li Chih received his early education from his father.¹⁵³ He passed the provincial examination in 1552 and, foregoing an attempt at the metropolitan examination, he presented himself for appointment to office. In 1556, he began a career of holding low ranking posts.¹⁵⁴ He resigned to mourn his father in 1560 and then, after returning to Peking to take up an appointment in the Imperial Academy in 1564, he had to retire to mourn his grandfather. Back once more in the capital in 1566, Li served as a secretary in the Ministry of Rites. Previously he had been resistant to the practice of discoursing on learning, even when he held office in Nanking. Now in Peking, he became interested in the *Diamond Sutra* and then the teachings of Wang Yang-ming and Wang Chi. "This proved to be a turning point in his intellectual life."¹⁵⁵

His involvement with philosophical inquiries deepened while he was serving again in Nanking for five years in the 1570s. There he met Wang Chi and the son of Wang Ken, whom Li declared to be his teacher. He began his association with Keng Ting-hsiang (1524–96), an official who was active with his younger brothers in promoting Wang Ken's interpretation of innate moral knowing. Li Chih began to take part in discourses on learning and to propound his own views. He read more about Buddhism.¹⁵⁶ Finally, after a three-year term as a prefect in Yunnan, Li retired from office in 1580.¹⁵⁷ This was the end of his not unusual official career spanning more than twenty

151 See the comment in Hok-lam Chan, *Li Chih 1527–1602 in contemporary Chinese historiography: New light on his life and works* (White Plains, NY, 1980), p. xiv and p. 5. Ray Huang, 1587 – *A year of no significance: The Ming dynasty in decline* (New Haven, 1981), pointed out that interpretations of Li Chih are inconsistent as a result of his not having a coherent theme (p. 211) and that his passing thoughts are not integrated (p. 198).

152 See Chi Wen-fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun*, p. 46.

153 Jung Chao-tsu, *Li Chih nien-p'ü* (Peking: San-lien, 1957), pp. 17–18. My discussion of Li Chih follows the dates given by Jung Chao-tsu and is heavily influenced by the accounts of Li in W.T. de Bary "Individualism and humanitarianism in late Ming thought," in *Self and society*, ed. de Bary, and in the entry by K.C. Hsiao on Li Chih in *DMB*. An informative survey of primary and secondary literature on Li Chih is in note 159 of de Bary's account; an updated version is in *Learning for one's self*, ed. de Bary (New York, 1991), pp. 392–93. A more complete listing to 1979 is in Chan, *Li Chih*, pp. 163–207.

154 Jung Chao-tsu, *Li Chih nien-p'ü*, p. 20.

155 K. C. Hsiao, in *DMB*, p. 808. The same point is made in de Bary, *Self and society*, p. 190, with reference to its earliest articulation in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 14, p. 304. Cf. Jung, *Li Chih nien-p'ü*, p. 28.

156 Jung, *Li Chih nien-p'ü*, pp. 31–35. See Chi Wen-fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun*, p. 40.

157 Jung, *Li Chih nien-p'ü*, p. 44.

years. He spent the remaining twenty years of his life reading and articulating the unusual ideas which made him famous, even notorious.

Li Chih began to act and write unconventionally in 1580. Instead of returning to Fukien, he went from Yunnan to the home of Keng Ting-hsiang and his brothers in Hu-kuang, where Li lived and taught for four years. While there he criticized his patron and others who, although they should have taken Lo Ju-fang's devotion to Yen Chün as their model, had not done enough to save Ho Hsin-yin from death in a Hu-kuang prison in 1579.¹⁵⁸ According to Li, Ho Hsin-yin was a sage, one of the great heroes of the times.¹⁵⁹ Simultaneously, Li could also praise Chang Chü-cheng as a hero, though Li knew many held Chang responsible for Ho's death. By blaming others, even Ho Hsin-yin to some extent, Li exonerated Chang of direct complicity.¹⁶⁰ His disputes with Keng Ting-hsiang led Li to leave Keng's home in 1585. He sent his wife back to Fukien, where she died in 1588, and moved himself to a Buddhist establishment near Ma-ch'eng in Hukuang where he built a chapel.¹⁶¹ There in 1588 he shaved his head and dressed like a monk, although he was neither ordained nor certified.

Li Chih gave varying reasons for his decisions, including, among others, a desire to signal his break from family responsibilities, to gain some relief from the intense summer heat, to confound those who thought he was unconventional anyway, and to be free "to be an individual."¹⁶² He did not exempt his own motives from scepticism. Denouncing the hypocrisy of his contemporaries who feigned an aloof moral stance, Li Chih wrote in a letter to his friend Chiao Hung, "How do we know that I do not have the heart of a merchant and have put on a Buddhist robe to deceive the world and snatch some fame for myself?"¹⁶³ Of course, we cannot know. Li did not take religious vows and he was particularly lax in religious observance.¹⁶⁴ He continued to be known by his lay names. He hung a picture of Confucius in the Buddhist temple.¹⁶⁵ Consider the inscription he composed, presumably to accompany the portrait. Li wrote that just as everyone else, he too considered

158 de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," pp. 191, 204; Jung, *Li Chih nien-p'u*, pp. 51–52, 63–64; Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, pp. 1041–42.

159 Chi Wen-fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun*, p. 41; Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1033. Also Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming yü hsüeh an*, 58, p. 1388.

160 Li Chih, "Ta Cheng Ming-fu," *Fen shu*, 1, pp. 15–16. Also see Chi Wen-fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun*, p. 44; and Huang, 1587, pp. 212–13.

161 Jung Chao-tsu, *Li Chih nien-p'u*, p. 55; 104. For a description of Li Chih's "chapel," see Huang, 1587, p. 194.

162 De Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," p. 192. See Jung, *Li Chih nien-p'u*, pp. 64–65; K. C. Hsiao, in *DMB*, pp. 808, 810; and Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, pp. 1036–38.

163 Li Chih, "Yu yü Chiao Jo-hou," *Fen shu*, 2, p. 47, modified from the translation in de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," p. 205. Cf. Huang, 1587, p. 190.

164 Huang, 1587, p. 197.

165 Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1039.

Confucius to be a great sage and Lao Tzu and Buddha to represent “different strands” (*i tuan*). No one really understood that distinction. It had been inculcated in them by their fathers and teachers who, in turn, were just passing it on from earlier Confucians (*ju*) who, in their time, misconstrued what Confucius himself had said. “Down to the present, no one has been using his eyes [to recognize the error]. Who am I to dare say I have eyes? I only follow the crowd in who is a great sage and whom to serve. For this reason, I am following the crowd in serving Confucius [by hanging his portrait] in the hall of the Iris Buddha.”¹⁶⁶ He could not have wanted this statement to be taken literally. All of his explanations of himself and others can be treated as relativistic. Toward the end of his life he was visited by one of his younger admirers who urged him to stop eating meat. The admirer feared the King of the Underworld (Yen wang) would not allow him to be reborn in the Pure Land. Li Chih dismissed this worry by claiming the King of the Underground ate meat so what could he say to Li? Besides, Li said, he believed in Confucian teachings (*ju-chiao*) and Mencius said after the age of seventy one could fill up on meat.¹⁶⁷ After other rebuffs, the admirer finally pleaded to Li that he could save contemporary mores by taking this one step because he was so renowned. Li wrote that he told the man, “If it would persuade them to really turn to the true Way, I would cut off my finger as well as vow not to eat meat.”¹⁶⁸ If nothing else, his eccentricities were a means of acting out his relativism.

In 1590, Li Chih at Ma-ch’eng published a collection of his letters, poems, and other writings under the provocative title, *A book to burn* (*fen shu*). In 1599 *A book to conceal* (*Ts’ang shu*) was published for him in Nanking, and the next year an expanded version of *A book to burn* appeared.¹⁶⁹ Over and over in these books Li was scathing in his attacks on those who feigned to be followers of Confucius and the Sung exponents of the Learning of the Way.¹⁷⁰ He charged that discourses on learning rather than promoting morality were harmful by distracting others from acting morally. Teaching about being filial could not be allowed to substitute for acting in a filial manner on the basis of one’s innate moral capacities.¹⁷¹ Those who engaged in discourses were hypocrites out for fame, high office, wealth, and honors. One of Li’s

166 Li Chih, “T’i K’ung tzu hsiang yü Chih Fo yüan,” *Hsü Fen shu* (1611; rpt. Peking, 1959), 4, p. 102.

167 Mencius only said that if the king did not interfere with the commoners so that the domestic animals did not miss their breeding season, then even those who are seventy would have meat to eat. See *Mencius*, 1A3.

168 Li Chih, “Shu Hsiao-hsiu shou chüan hou,” *Hsü Fen shu*, 2, pp. 69–70.

169 Jung Chao-tsu, *Li Chih nien-p’u*, pp. 68, 91; K. C. Hsiao, *DMB*, pp. 809, 811; de Bary, “Individualism and humanitarianism,” pp. 192–93.

170 Li Chih, “Yu yü Chiao Jo-hou,” *Fen shu*, 2, p. 46.

171 Li Chih, “Yü Chiao Jo-hou t’ai-shih,” *Hsü Fen shu*, 1, p. 16; de Bary, “Individualism and humanitarianism,” p. 204.

joys seems to have been denouncing those who had been self-righteously assuming the mantle of morality.¹⁷²

According to Li Chih, each person could determine his own “shoulds” without allowing himself to be dependent on the authority of others. “Yesterday’s right is today’s wrong. Today’s wrong is right again tomorrow. Even if Confucius reappeared today, there is no means of knowing how he would judge right and wrong, so how can we arbitrarily judge everything as if there were a fixed standard?”¹⁷³ Li made his point by offering his own book full of opinions which turned on their head the conventional views about hundreds of historical personages. If judgements about history are only relative, no one can declare Li wrong, or right. It may be easy to allow the relativity of all historical judgments; moral judgments are a weightier matter.

Contrary to moralists’ claims that we should put shared interests (*kung*) ahead of personal interests (*ssu*), Li Chih declared that a person does, or could, act on his selfish desires.¹⁷⁴ This put him at odds with centuries of Confucian teachings. According to Li Chih, we should revert to the untrained and thus unspoiled heart of a child which supposedly lies within each of us.¹⁷⁵ Li Chih’s unconventional behavior testified to his following his heart’s desires,¹⁷⁶ just as his unconventional opinions were evidence of his independence. “What others take as right and wrong is inadequate to serve as the standard for me. From the start I have never taken as right and wrong for myself what others think is right and wrong. If I considered their right and wrong as right and wrong for me, my conduct certainly would not be as it is.”¹⁷⁷ Besides, if one’s views of right and wrong were completely congruent with the views of the sages, there would be no point in expressing them.¹⁷⁸ He resisted the imposition of one’s views on others and thought arguing about right and wrong was self-defeating. “Now if someone discourses on right and wrong, I am going to discourse with him, and when we go on without stop we end up quarreling. Hearing us, another person either would not regard that initial discourse on right and wrong as despicable or would despise our quarreling about right and wrong.”¹⁷⁹ Disputes about right and wrong

172 Li Chih, “Yu yü Chiao Jo-hou,” *Fen shu*, 2, pp. 45–46.

173 Li Chih, “Ch’ien lun,” *Ts’ang shu*, p. 7, slightly altered from translation in de Bary, “Individualism and humanitarianism,” p. 201. Also see K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 811.

174 De Bary, “Individualism and humanitarianism,” pp. 200–01; K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 812; Jung, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 244.

175 Li Chih, “Tung hsin shuo” *Fen shu*, 3, pp. 97–98. Also see de Bary, “Individualism and humanitarianism,” p. 195; K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, pp. 811–12.

176 K. C. Hsiao, in *DMB*, p. 812.

177 Li Chih, “Yu ta Keng Chung-ch’eng,” *Fen shu*, 1, p. 18; slightly altered from trans. in de Bary, “Individualism and humanitarianism,” p. 199.

178 Li Chih, “Ssu-ma Ch’ien,” *Ts’ang shu*, 30. Also cited in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 241.

179 Li Chih, “Yü Yang Ting-chien,” *Fen shu*, 1, p. 19.

are fruitless because morality is relative; there is no indisputable foundation for moral judgment. With some irony, Li suggested his *Book to Conceal* be used in the Classics Mat lectures for the emperor and in the examination essays for officials,¹⁸⁰ but he did not arrogate only for himself this privilege of passing judgment on others past and present.

Li licensed everyone to pass such judgment. "Each person possesses the mirror of Great Perfect Wisdom [taught in the *Prajñā Pāramitā*], which is the luminous power [taught in the Great Learning]. With this luminous power (*ming te*), we are one with heaven above and earth below and with the myriad sagely and accomplished men. No one has more of it nor do I [or anyone else] have less."¹⁸¹ In a sense, Li Chih was carrying the idea of innate moral knowing to a logical extreme,¹⁸² shorn now of the implicit assumption that each person would act in accord with traditional moral values as he discovered them in his own heart. Li allowed that each person could and should decide for himself, without the precondition that he must, in the end, be concordant with his fellows. Li argued that not even heaven-and-earth can compel the mass of humans to act in accord with each one's own sense of orderliness; it is thus misguided for would-be teachers now to seek to impose Confucius on others when the sages themselves never attempted such a thing.¹⁸³

Li Chih's relativist stance entailed an iconoclasm which was amusing and sometimes shocking to his audience,¹⁸⁴ but there was a deeper motive for paying attention to him. Tsou Shan (*chih-shih* 1556), the son of Wang Yang-ming's disciple, Tsou Shou-i (1491–1562), was asked why Li Chih had so many followers. Tsou Shan said, "In their heart everyone wants to become sagacious or accomplished, but how could there not be obstacles to that? Now *he* says alcohol, sex, wealth, and anger do not block the route to enlightenment. With this convenience offered, who would not follow him?"¹⁸⁵ Shih Meng-lin, a 1583 *chih shih* who was closely associated with Ku Hsien-ch'eng and the Tung-lin Academy, wrote that when Li Chih had discoursed on learning in Nanking in the 1570s, he taught that "every person already is a fully realized, perfect sage. When he heard of a loyal, chaste, filial or righteous person, he would say that they were all forced [rather than spontaneous] as our original natures do not have those qualities. Students liked this expedi-

180 Li Chih, "Yü Keng Tzu-chien shu," *Hsü Fen shu*, 1, p. 46; also quoted in Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1045, Jung, *Li Chih nien-p'u*, pp. 87–77, and in Huang, 1587, p. 216.

181 Li Chih, "Yü Ma Li-shan," *Hsü Fen shu*, 1, pp. 3–4. This trans. draws on de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," p. 194, and K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 810.

182 Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 242.

183 Li Chih, "Ta Keng Chung-ch'eng," *Fen shu*, 1, p. 17.

184 See examples given by Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 811. Instances of Li Chih's outrageous revisionist views of history were cited against him in the memorial of 1602 which is referred to below.

185 In Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 16, p. 347. Also trans. in de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," p. 217.

ent and rushed to him as if gone wild.”¹⁸⁶ It may not be possible to determine how many literati actually came under Li Chih’s influence, but it is clear that he also stimulated opposition. Shih Meng-lin denounced Li and other recent teachers who, in their enthusiasm for being spontaneous (*tzu jan*), taught that following your original nature meant eating when hungry and sleeping when tired. To Shih Meng-lin, this meant encouraging humans to act like beasts and to turn their backs on Confucius’ and Mencius’ repeated teachings about the need for making an effort (*kung fu*) to be moral.¹⁸⁷ Li’s critics might deprecate his admirers as morally lazy, but Li was reaching for an apparent solution to the quest for individual moral autonomy which had been an ongoing concern for more than a century.

Li did more than support the view that each person could follow his own desires and sentiments. By exposing flawed argument and insincere conduct, he appeared to some to be successfully articulating a relativist alternative to discredited everyday moral beliefs (e.g. the inferiority of women, the unquestioned tradition of submitting to authority) as well as grandiose philosophical constructs, especially in the Learning of the Way.¹⁸⁸ He was filling a vacuum left by the default of others’ teachings in the 1580s and 1590s. But he was a literatus, a holder of a provincial degree who had served as an official for two decades. Some interpretations of Li Chih stress that he was alienated from all other literati, that he “turned his back on his own class, the ruling elite,”¹⁸⁹ or that he was never fully integrated with the ethos of officials because of his family background involving commerce and Islam.¹⁹⁰ Li’s social background was not unique, and his appointment as an erudite at the Imperial Academy in Peking suggests his command of the classical tradition was more than acceptable to his superiors and peers, even though he usually did not get along with them. More perspicaciously, Shen Te-fu (1578–1642) asserted that Li’s “intelligence overwhelmed his generation.”¹⁹¹ Whatever Li’s psychological or intellectual motives, he was asserting a relativistic interpretation for a literati audience that each person can decide for himself. As his admirer, Yüan Hung-tao, pointed out,

186 Shih Meng-lin, in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 60, p. 1475. Also translated in H. Busch, “The Tung-lin shu-yüan,” *Monumenta Serica*, p. 89. Hou, p. 1067, cites a nearly identical passage from Ku Hsien-ch’eng, “Tang hsia i,” in *Ku Tuan-wen kung i-shu*. Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 243, says Ku was citing Shih here.

187 Shih Meng-lin, in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsüeh an*, 60, p. 1475.

188 See Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 246–47, and 255–56.

189 De Bary, “Individualism and humanitarianism,” p. 210.

190 Jean-François Billeter, *Li Zhi, philosophe maudit* (Genève, 1979), p. 269, contends that Li Chih’s thought and conduct were a product of what he calls the contradictions between his background and the values of officialdom. Some Marxist historians in China also stressed this aspect. E.g., Hou Wai-lu, et al., *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t’ung shih*, 4B, p. 1031. But see Huang, 1587, p. 190.

191 Shen Te-fu, *Wan-li Yeh huo pien* (1619; rpt. 1827; 1869; 1959; 2nd ed. Peking, 1980), p. 691.

Li did not become a recluse.¹⁹² He used his literary skills and his insider knowledge of classics, histories, Buddhist and Taoist texts, official procedures and literati mores to undermine conventional thinking.¹⁹³ Although Li held that human nature was always the same, or at least not too dissimilar, and that circumstances in which humans found themselves were also the same, he felt that somehow he alone was different, or at least only rarely did he recognize a kindred spirit. He knew that by expressing his dissenting views he was offending. "The opinions of those who are literate or live off official salaries in general are all the same, and when they are confronted with me they either think I am mad or that I could be executed."¹⁹⁴

Indeed, his views were perceived as offensive and ultimately as dangerous. After his first book was published in 1590, he left his Buddhist refuge near Ma-ch'eng in Hu-kuang, perhaps under duress from Keng Ting-hsiang. Keng had criticized Li and in turn was the addressee in a set of acerbic letters included in the *Book to burn*.¹⁹⁵ Li traveled and lodged with various patrons, some of them powerful officials.¹⁹⁶ He was back in Ma-ch'eng in the winter of 1600 when a mob destroyed the Buddhist refuge where he stayed. Anger was aroused against him because of his purported disregard for social and sexual conventions, although he was more than seventy years old at the time.¹⁹⁷ He escaped arrest by fleeing, and the following spring he went north to T'ung-chou, near Peking.¹⁹⁸ In 1602 Li was staying there as a guest of a retired censor when he again came under attack. Perhaps at the instigation of a Grand Secretary who had been offended by Li, a censor at the capital submitted a memorial explaining that Li was a former official who had shaved his head. He was accused of publishing misleading books maligning Confucius and blatantly indulging in shameful conduct. Youths were imitating his licentious ways and literati were worshiping according to his ersatz Buddhism. The censor recommended that Li be sent back to Fukien before he could contaminate the capital and that his writings all be destroyed. The request was granted.¹⁹⁹ In his own defense Li Chih said his books were for

192 In Huang, 1587, p. 199.

193 See de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," p. 203; and Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 253-54.

194 Li Chih, "Ch'ing-ling yao," *Fen shu*, 5.209. Also trans. by K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 814. Cf. Jung, *Li Chih nien-p'u*, pp. 57-58.

195 K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 809; Huang, 1587, pp. 195-96.

196 See Huang, 1587, p. 208.

197 K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, pp. 813-14. Cf. the discussion of an ulterior political motive for the accusations against Li, in Hsiao, p. 815. Cf. Huang, 1587, p. 217.

198 Jung Chao-tsu, *Li Chih nien-p'u*, pp. 104-06.

199 *MSL, Shen-tsung shih-lu* (Taipei, 1966), 369, pp. 112-122 (pp. 6917-19). Also quoted in Ku, *Jib-chih lu*, 18, pp. 28b-29a, "Li Chih." Partly translated by K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 814. Also cited in de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," p. 217, Chan, *Li Chih*, p. 4, and Huang, 1587, pp. 219-20.

the enhancement and not to the detriment of the sages' teachings. Held under arrest in T'ung-chou, Li Chih cut his throat and died a day or two later.²⁰⁰ Whether he was a martyr or a sick old man, any attempt to put a meaning on his final act also has to take into account his relativism.²⁰¹

The danger contained in Li Chih's relativism did not vanish with his death. In spite of prohibitions, his books continued to circulate. A memorial in 1625 reported that literati and officials still liked them and hid them from destruction.²⁰² The appeal of Li Chih's books lay partly in their shock value. In this, they were similar to contemporary novels, notably the *Chin p'ing mei*, which also enjoyed wide circulation along with vehement denunciation.²⁰³ More importantly, Li's writing and the most famous late Ming novels conveyed an implicit relativistic message: there is no single, unchanging, correct viewpoint; there are multiple, disjunctive, conditional meanings.²⁰⁴ In the novels, values are topsy-turvy, as was Li's life. Li Chih was not amoral. He was not a philosophical sceptic and he was not anti-intellectual. He made judgments about right and wrong. As K.C. Hsiao observed, "What he demanded was that all values, intellectual as well as moral, be authenticated by each person's inward commitment."²⁰⁵ By suggesting in various ways that there neither are certain, shared standards nor invariable truths, Li Chih was undermining all external authorities, a position which had been broached by a number of writers through the sixteenth century. In a 1602 memorial endorsing the suppression of Li Chih's writings, the Minister of Rites, Feng Ch'i, wrote that the likes of Ch'en Hsien-chang and Wang Yang-ming had insinuated Buddhist concepts into Our Way, but now Li Chih and his ilk were openly praising Buddhism over Our Way (*wu tao*).²⁰⁶ Going further, Ku Yen-wu observed with lament that no one else had ever been such a recusant as Li Chih against the sages.²⁰⁷ Being content with the possibility of differences of opinion among individuals rather than claiming that a shared result would ensue from each person's examining his own heart,²⁰⁸ Li Chih

200 K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 814. Jung Chao-tsu, *Li Chih-nien-p'u*, pp. 111, 113. Huang, 1587, pp. 189–90.

201 See the comment by Huang, 1587, p. 189.

202 Quoted in Ku Wen-yu, *Jih chih lu*, 18, p. 29b, end of entry on Li Chih. See de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," n. 261 on p. 243 for further evidence on this point.

203 A similar point is reported in de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," p. 215. Also see Chi Wen-fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun*, p. 46.

204 See Andrew H. Plaks, *The four masterworks of the Ming novel* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 498–512. Plaks finds irony in all of the novels, with the surface meaning dissolving for the thoughtful reader, who is left groping for some underlying meaning. It is noteworthy that Li Chih's name was associated as commentator or editor with three of the four great Ming novels. See Plaks, pp. 215, 376, and 513.

205 K. C. Hsiao in *DMB*, p. 817.

206 Cited in Ku Yen-wu, *Jih chih lu chi-shih*, 18, p. 22a, "Ko-ch'ang chin yueh."

207 Ku Yen-wu, *Jih chih lu chi-shih*, 18, p. 29a, "Li Chih." Also cited in de Bary, "Individualism and humanitarianism," p. 216.

208 Li Chih, "Ch'ien lun," *Ts'ang shu*, p. 7.

was being a relativist who discredited consensus morality for literati and thus for government officials. But as a relativist, he was not disclosing a sharable ethic for the literate elite.

Re-emphasizing moral effort

Proponents of discourses on learning in the 1570s drew opposition from Grand Secretary Chang Chü-cheng and his allies, who sought to break up their discourses because of their growing political influence as well as on intellectual grounds. On another front, Wang Yang-ming's later followers, who were perceived to advocate the individualistic idea of independently establishing one's own ethic, generated intellectual opposition from literati who maintained their faith in the concept of innate moral knowing, but who also renewed emphasis on the need for effort to effect moral good in one's life and in the conduct of government. The historically most prominent leader in this renewal was Ku Hsien-ch'eng.

Ku Hsien-ch'eng (1550–1612), the third son of a merchant from Wu-hsi on the Grand Canal north of Soochow, established his reputation among literati in Nan Chihli when he was ranked first in the provincial examination at Nan-king in 1576.²⁰⁹ Almost immediately he had to enter mourning for his father's death, but in 1580 he was able to go to Peking and pass the metropolitan examination. His official career began well enough when he was assigned in the capital as a secretary in the Board of Revenue. He made common cause with two new *chin-shih* of 1580 who also, like Ku, had been ranked first in their provincial examinations, one, Chiang Shih-ch'ang in Fukien and the other, Li San-ts'ai (d. 1623) in Peking. Ku also began to be critical of the reigning Grand Secretary, Chang Chü-cheng, who used the regular censorial scrutiny of metropolitan officials in 1581 to act against those who had criticized him for not resigning from office to mourn his father in 1577. In 1582, when religious services were held to pray that Chang might recover from his fatal illness, Ku and some of his associates at the Board of Revenue, including his friend, Chao Nan-hsing (1550–1627), refused to join with the court officials who supported the prayers. Chang died, and Ku Hsien-ch'eng himself resigned on a leave of absence in the autumn of 1583.²¹⁰

Ku was by this time committed to Wang Yang-ming's concept of innate moral knowing. When he returned to Peking in the autumn of 1586, he met

209 See entry by Heinrich Busch in *DMB*. Also sections on Ku in Busch, "The Tung-lin Academy and its political and philosophical significance," *Monumenta Serica*, 14 (1949–55), pp. 1–163. Also Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 284–301; Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, ch. 58, p. 1376; and Ching, *Records*, p. 226.

210 On Chao Nan-hsing, see *DMB. MS*, 243, pp. 6297–301.

T'ang Po-yüan (1541–98), a 1574 *chin-shih* who, in 1584, was vehement in protesting the inclusion of Wang Yang-ming's name into the Confucian temple, which was finally being accomplished after the death of Chang Chü-cheng.²¹¹ T'ang told Ku that all the talk about innate moral knowing was dangerous to society, and thus, he could not avoid denouncing Wang. Ku recounted that he explained why Wang had to formulate the new concept of developing innate moral knowing (*chih liang chih*) by combining phrases from the *Great Learning* and the *Mencius*. Wang's concept was not erroneous and should not be blamed for the anti-social excesses of men who merely claimed to be acting on their innate knowing. Where Ku drew the line, he told T'ang, was at the teaching that human nature has no good as well as no evil, which was a direct criticism of Chou Ju-teng.²¹² These were criticisms which Ku later found time to develop more fully.

After sporadically serving in office at the capital for ten years, Ku's criticisms were so annoying that he was punished by being taken off the register of officials and returned to commoner status. In 1594, Ku left the capital with a huge send-off from his sympathizers, but his career as an official was over. He never again served in office. Back in Wu-hsi, Ku Hsien-ch'eng gradually built another platform from which he was able to continue to be involved in the maneuvers over appointments in the capital. He named his study "Careful" (*hsiao hsin*), which represented an opposite pole to "spontaneous" (*tzu jan*). He began to engage in discourses on learning at local temples. Then he and his brothers built in their home a Hall for Colleagues (*T'ung jen t'ang*), a name with clear political implications. By 1598, he had the intention of seeking fellowship with those he regarded as good literati from more than just his area of Nan Chih-li.²¹³ In 1603, Ku Hsien-ch'eng, his brother, and Kao P'an-lung raised the funds to build and endow a permanent site for discourses on learning. They revived an old name when they called it the Tung-lin Academy (*Tung-lin shu-yüan*). It opened in 1604, with rules and regulations written by Ku and as much autonomy from local officials as they could manage. They planned to have a major three-day meeting every autumn, numerous minor meetings, and places to stay. It was quickly established as a place to see and be seen and heard, although as Huang Tsung-hsi pointed out, only a limited number of men, mostly from Nan Chih-li, actually participated in discourses on learning there.²¹⁴

211 *MS*, 282, p. 7257. Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiueh an*, 42, p. 1005. See Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," pp. 113–14.

212 Ku Hsien-ch'eng, *Hsiao hsin chai cha-chi* (1877; rpt. Taipei, 1975), 4, pp. 3a–b. Trans. in Busch, pp. 113–14.

213 Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1100.

214 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingju hsiueh an*, 58, p. 1375. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 223.

Ku Hsien-ch'eng found in discourses on learning an alternative but related outlet for his efforts at moral revitalization of those who led the government. He knew that making clear what was right and wrong was a necessary preliminary to dealing with political problems. In his statutes (*yüeh*) for the Tung-lin Academy, Ku defended discourses on learning against charges that they were irrelevant or even inimical to actual implementation of morality.²¹⁵ His view was that they had been misused, and he traced part of the responsibility for their misuse to Wang Yang-ming. He pointed especially to two sentences of Wang's. "When we apprehend [what is moral] after seeking it in our own heart, we dare not consider it not so even though the words we put to it are not to be found among those of Confucius. When we do not apprehend [that it is morally good] after seeking it in our own heart, we dare not consider it so even though the words put to it are to be found among those of Confucius."²¹⁶ This was a call for self-reliance. In Ku Hsien-ch'eng's view, these ideas were a tonic, powerfully effective in liberating men from the restrictions of Chu Hsi's teachings. Through such ideas Wang Yang-ming released literati from slavish devotion to heaps of texts and sought to preclude their excusing themselves from acting morally by their professing to venerate sages, including Confucius, as inaccessible ideals which always needed further study and thus could not be emulated. But Ku was equally plain that the ideas in these two sentences had led men to being recklessly neglectful of the sages who provided a model to be shared in action by us all. Ku Hsien-ch'eng argued that "the empowering aspect of Wang Yang-ming's teachings lies in these [two sentences], but the unfulfilling aspect of them also lies in the two."²¹⁷ Ku sought to elucidate the teachings in a manner which would avoid the recklessness (*tang*) of later followers of Wang without reverting to the restrictiveness (*chü*) often associated in Ming times with Chu Hsi's teachings.

In part, Ku's solution was to reassert that goodness (*shan*) is in every person as part of his human nature (*hsing*). Ku denied as excessive the interpretation that human nature, by definition, not only has no evil, but also has no goodness in it.²¹⁸ He argued that when those who assume that the heart (or mind) is beyond good or evil speak of mind-in-itself as "void, luminous, transparent, serene, and tranquil," they are implying that those are all states

215 See Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 35, paraphrasing the *yüeh* in *Tung-lin shu-yüan chih* (1881 ed.), ch. 2. Also see Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih*, p. 1101.

216 Quoted in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 288–89. Cf. Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 100. Wang wrote this in a letter to Lo Ch'in-shun.

217 Quoted in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, 288. Also trans. in Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 100.

218 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 58, p. 1379. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 230–31. Also Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 297.

or realities of mind we *ought* to attain, and thus, they are good; they are particular names for particular virtues which, along with ten thousand other virtues of the mind, all come under a prior idea of goodness which encompasses filial piety, loyalty, and all the other traditional virtues. Good, according to Ku Hsien-ch'eng, is the color (*se*) or attribute of mind-in-itself.²¹⁹ Ku denied the sufficiency of the fundamental claim in Wang Yang-ming's departure from Chu Hsi's teachings: that mind just is principle (*hsin chi li*).²²⁰ Instead, Ku argued that goodness is also located in things external to our minds (or hearts), and thus, he sought to restore the idea that the mind was a proper object of moral cultivation.

Ku made the "goodness of human nature" into his slogan in order to shift the focus away from mind and from following it spontaneously (*tz'u jan*). His book of philosophical jottings, which he dated as beginning in 1594, opened with a challenge to all who had been treating mind as central in discourses on learning. He wrote, "One can talk about 'learning' only after he knows about human nature; one can talk about 'human nature' only after he knows about [true] learning."²²¹

Ku Hsien-ch'eng was not advocating a simple restoration of Chu Hsi's teachings. He pointed out that the pivotal claim made by Ch'eng I and Chu Hsi – that we can fathom coherence (*li*) by investigating things – was not present in the classics.²²² He acknowledged that in his day few men wanted to discuss Chu Hsi. However, Ku sought to rescue Chu Hsi by arguing that Ch'eng and Chu had not meant literally that we *must* investigate even a blade of grass (or sprouting bamboo, as Wang Yang-ming had fruitlessly tried) in order to fathom coherence; they intended the focus of our efforts to be on our natures and our moral mind, primarily on what is internal rather than external to us.²²³ Ku's intention was to reconcile Chu and Wang and save the world from the extremes of being too restricted and being too reckless.

To combat the dangerous reliance on spontaneously following the dictates of one's innate moral knowing, Ku emphasized the necessity of moral effort (*kung fu*). He acknowledged the insight of Wang Yang-ming's Four Sentences teaching but found that its reference to the mind-in-itself (*hsin chih t'i*) rendered ambiguous the status of effort.²²⁴ For Ku, an important aspect of that

219 T'ang Chün-i, "Liu Tsung-chou's doctrine," in *The unfolding of neo-Confucianism*, ed. de Bary, Studies in Oriental Culture, No. 10 (New York and London, 1975), pp. 308–09.

220 Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 103.

221 Ku Hsien-ch'eng, *Hsiao hsin chai cha chi*, p. 1a.

222 Ku Hsien-ch'eng, *Hsiao hsin chai cha chi*, 7, p. 10b. Cf. Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 295; and Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 116.

223 Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 293–96; and Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," pp. 116–17.

224 Ku Hsien-ch'eng, *Tung-lin hui yueh*, No. 1, quoted in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 291.

effort was to respect the classics as the source of moral guidance,²²⁵ but equally one needed to set as one's task the goal of becoming a fully moral human through individual effort (*txu li*).²²⁶ The declared purpose of the meetings at the Tung-lin Academy was to assist the participants in setting in motion in their daily lives Ku's vision of moral effort.²²⁷

Ku Hsien-ch'eng was not propounding anything new. Wu Ying-chi (1594–1645) commented that Ku's discourses on learning at the Tung-lin Academy were "what every student of the classics knew and not worth hearing . . ." ²²⁸ In a sense Wu was correct, but Ku and some of his contemporaries perceived that too many literati had lost interest in reading the classics for moral guidance and needed to be recalled to them. The classics of the sages provided the external discipline required to save men from wandering off into the individualism which seemed to threaten. Ku's voice was a prominent one in this attempt, but the political involvements of the Tung-lin Academy, more than his ideas, are what have attracted historians' attentions to him.

Moral reform was also on the mind of Tsou Yüan-piao (1551–1624), whose career was similar to Ku Hsien-ch'eng's. In the tenth month of 1577, the year Tsou became a *chin-shih*, the repeated criticisms peaked against Grand Secretary Chang Chü-cheng for not retiring from office to mourn properly for his father. Four officials were beaten at court in an effort to stifle the attacks. At that juncture Tsou Yüan-piao sought to present his own memorial attacking Chang Chü-cheng as a bad influence on the young emperor. The attending eunuchs, not wanting to accept it, said to him, "Don't you fear death? Isn't it the wrong time to discuss this?" Tsou assured them that his document was merely a request for a leave of absence. When the memorial was accepted and read, Tsou was beaten eighty strokes and banished to Kweichow, where he spent the next six years.²²⁹ After Chang Chü-cheng died in 1582, Tsou was reappointed to office. He continued to memorialize against various high officials as he went in and out of office until 1593, when he retired.

Tsou Yüan-piao went home to Chi-shui (Chi-an prefecture) in Kiangsi and established an academy for discourses on learning. He defended discourses from the criticism that those who engaged in them were impractical and devoid of talent; according to Tsou, true talent developed out of discoursing

225 Ku Hsien-ch'eng, *Tung-lin hui yüeh*, No. 3, in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 291.

226 Ku Hsien-ch'eng, *Tung-lin hui yüeh*, No. 2, in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 291.

227 Ku Hsien-ch'eng, *Tung-lin hui yüeh*, No. 4, in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 292. Cf. Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 35.

228 Wu Ying-chi, *Tung-lin pen-mo*, in *Tung-lin shih-mo*, ed. Li Chi (Shanghai, 1946), p. 12. Cf. Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 119.

229 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 23, p. 533. *MS*, 243, pp. 6301–02. Also see entry on Tsou Yüan-piao in *DMB*.

on learning.²³⁰ Tsou acknowledged that when he was young he had been ram-bunctious and had mistakenly relied on his own awareness (*chiieh*), a term with strong Buddhist overtones. Only after many years did he come to realize that learning (*hsüeh*) was more important.²³¹ Committed to the idea that we must begin by understanding mind-in-itself,²³² Tsou nevertheless was critical of his contemporaries who were interpreting “following the desires in one’s own heart” (*ts’ung hsin so yü*) as licensing indulgence (*tsung*) without regard for right and wrong. Tsou argued that desires needed to be subject to discipline.²³³ He taught that moral effort (*kung fu*) involved being compassionate in all one’s relations with others, including with ordinary men and women.²³⁴ Tsou wanted to emend the prevailing interpretation of compassion as “according to one’s own heart.” He insisted it also include the idea of “according to others’ hearts.”²³⁵ Although, as Huang Tsung-hsi pointed out, Tsou’s interpretation of compassion had more to do with Ch’an Buddhist usage than with that of the followers of Confucius, his emphasis on embodying externally imposed restraints and models align him with Confucians, not Buddhists.²³⁶ This emphasis also reveals Tsou Yüan-piao, too, was participating in the withdrawal from the more individualistic interpretations of Wang Yang-ming’s teachings. However, his etymologies and his explanations of passages from the classics tended to be far-fetched and not supported by philological evidence.

After a hiatus of more than twenty-five years, Tsou Yüan-piao was recalled to office in 1620, following the death of the Wan-li emperor. He served briefly as a Vice Minister, first of Justice, and then Personnel. In 1622 he founded an academy in Peking for discourses on learning. He was joined in this effort by Feng Ts’ung-wu.

Feng Ts’ung-wu (1556–c. 1627) was from Ch’ang-an, Shensi, and not a southerner like Tsou Yüan-piao and Ku Hsien-ch’eng. Feng studied under Hsü Fu-yüan (1535–1604), who had disputed with Chou Ju-teng over Wang Chi’s negative interpretation of the Four Sentences teaching. Feng thus was not to be counted among the later individualistic followers of Wang Yang-ming, and like Tsou Yüan-piao and Ku Hsien-ch’eng, his career as an official was aborted in the 1590s. Feng became a *chin-shih* in 1589 and served for a year as a censor. After submitting criticisms of the emperor’s per-

230 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 23, pp. 533 and 536.

231 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 23, p. 535.

232 According to Huang Tsung-hsi’s summary, Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 23, p. 535.

233 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 23, p. 547.

234 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 23, p. 535.

235 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 23, p. 539.

236 Comment by Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, pp. 535–36.

sonal conduct, he went on sick leave in 1592. When he returned to office in 1595 or 1596, he was forced to resign along with the other censors who had incurred the disapprobation of the emperor.²³⁷ In retirement, Feng lived in Ch'ang-an, where he engaged in discourses on learning and wrote. In 1609, an academy was constructed for him there with official support. Hundreds of men, not all of them literati, attended.²³⁸ Feng Ts'ung-wu defended the practice of discourses on learning from contemporary criticism and government suspicions, even declaring that discoursing on learning was the pivotal task of investigating (or rectifying) things (*ko wu*).²³⁹ He also stressed the need for caution and adherence to rules.²⁴⁰

One of Feng Ts'ung-wu's main disputes was with the idea of the negative heart (*wu hsin*) that has neither good nor evil. Arrogating for himself the role of spokesman for "us Confucians" (*wu ju*), he sought to refute his rivals, representative of what he called the other strands (*i tuan*). In contrast to the correct view of "us Confucians" that one's heart (or mind), by definition, is not evil and is not concerned with profit, they falsely claim that our hearts are not involved with righteousness and are not good either. Their view is based on Wang Chi's theory of the negative heart (*wu hsin*), that is, emptiness being the fundamental aspect (*pen't'i*) of the human heart, it has no involvement with profit or righteousness and is neither good nor evil. According to Feng, his rivals maintained that, as there is no heart which is evil and no heart which is good, then by this logic, there is no heart which is not good: i.e., the heart is good in some transcendent sense. On practical grounds, Feng feared that absence of concern with righteousness in the heart does not necessarily mean an absence of concern for profit, and that absence of good in the heart does not necessarily mean evil is absent. His analysis was that if one's heart leaves off from righteousness, it goes in pursuit of profit, and if it departs from good, it must be in pursuit of evil. One cannot transcend the alternatives; one must be one or the other. Since the premise of "us Confucians" is that human nature is good and has righteousness, the locus for that good and that righteousness must be in our hearts.²⁴¹ Feng Ts'ung-wu was attempting to refute a century of argument in his effort to re-establish that heart, or mind, is not morally transcendent and that it needs to be restrained, not let loose. Feng's arguments were intended to reaffirm the possibility and

237 Entry on Feng Ts'ung-wu in *DMB*. The most extensive discussion in English on Feng is in Handlin, *Action in late Ming thought*, pp. 84–99. *MS*, 243, pp. 6315–16; Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 41, p. 984.

238 Handlin, *Action in late Ming thought*, p. 86.

239 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 41, pp. 984 and 992.

240 Handlin, *Action in late Ming thought*, p. 90; quoting Feng Ts'ung-wu, *Feng Shao-hsüeh*, 15, pp. 43a and 58a. Also Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 41, p. 984.

241 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 41, pp. 985–86.

desirability of doing good. He promoted these ideas in the Ch'ang-an area after he was forced out of office at the Wan-li Emperor's behest. When the emperor died in 1620, Feng again had the opportunity to serve in the government.

Feng Ts'ung-wu returned to Peking in 1621 to accept an appointment to the Grand Court of Revision and then to a censorial position. Tsou Yüan-piao was also appointed to the Grand Court of Revision and was made Vice-Minister of Justice before he had even reached Peking. In 1622, Feng and Tsou were both censors and both were interested in pursuing the discourses on learning with which they had been occupied for two decades in their home provinces. Together they organized the Shou-shan Academy at the capital.²⁴² Huang Tsun-su (1584–1626) supposedly cautioned Tsou Yüan-piao against holding discourses on learning at the capital, but without effect.²⁴³ Of greater consequence was the disapproval by the eunuch Wei Chung-hsien, who almost immediately arranged a decree prohibiting the Shou-shan Academy on the grounds that the downfall of the Sung imperial house stemmed from discourses on learning,²⁴⁴ with the implication that the Ming imperial line was not to risk a similar fate. The attempt to open an academy for discourses on learning at the capital was cut off, and both Tsou Yüan-piao and Feng Ts'ung-wu resigned from office. They were fortunate, as they lived out their remaining years in retirement at home.²⁴⁵

Their contemporary, Kao P'an-lung (1562–1626), was less fortunate. He participated with them in the discourses on learning at the Shou-shan Academy and then, in 1623, retired to his home in Wu-hsi. Although he was loath to return, he went back to Peking in 1624 to serve again in the government, where his involvements led directly to his suicide in 1626.

Kao P'an-lung, like Ku Hsien-ch'eng, was from the district of Wu-hsi.²⁴⁶ In 1586, while Ku was home on a leave of absence from government service, he was discoursing on learning when he was heard by Kao P'an-lung, a young provincial graduate of 1582. It set Kao on his course to fame.²⁴⁷ When Kao passed the metropolitan examination in 1589, his examiner was

²⁴² *MS*, 243, pp. 6306 and 6316, and Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 41, p. 984.

²⁴³ *MS*, 245, p. 6363. Cf. Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 61, p. 1489. Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 74; and John Meskill, *Academies in Ming China: An historical essay*, Monographs for the Association for Asian Studies, No. 39 (Tucson, 1982), p. 142.

²⁴⁴ *MS*, 243, p. 6306. Cf. Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 62. Feng Ts'ung-wu supposedly said that the weakness of the Sung was due to the prohibition of discourses on learning. Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 41, p. 984.

²⁴⁵ See DMB under Feng and Tsou.

²⁴⁶ See DMB under Kao P'an-lung; Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," pp. 142–44; Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 58, pp. 1398–99, trans. in Ching, *Records*, pp. 234–40; Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 301–03.

²⁴⁷ Jung, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 301.

Ku's friend, Chao Nan-hsing. After the mourning period for his uncle, by whom he had been adopted as heir, Kao was appointed in 1592 to a minor post at the capital. The next year he was in Nanking as an imperial messenger when Chao Nan-hsing and later Ku Hsien-ch'eng were dismissed for their involvement in the struggle with the Grand Secretaries over the scrutiny of metropolitan officials. Kao's ensuing protests led to his being assigned to a minor post in Kwangtung.

Going to the far south was a journey of self discovery for Kao P'an-lung.²⁴⁸ His account describes a psychological and philosophical quest. It was begun in an ostensible political disgrace which he and others could regard as honorable. It shows the stages of his reconciliation with his frustrating circumstances through his developing awareness of a larger world which included landscape and memories, as well as new friends and ideas. At a remote inn in the mountains of Fukien he found a place on its top floor from which to gaze at the stream and the mountains. Alone, and feeling content, he read (or remembered?) the great Sung thinker Ch'eng Hao's comment on the passage in the *Analects* (7.15) on still finding joy regardless of one's tribulations; Ch'eng Hao had added, "The ten thousand vicissitudes are all in one's person. There is nothing there in reality."²⁴⁹ Kao suddenly realized what this meant and his sense of being troubled dropped like a great weight from his shoulders. He felt as one with the cosmos. Kao, who said he previously had been scornful of others who boasted of enlightenment (*wu*), now had experienced it himself. It remained meaningful to him for the rest of his life. It was also, as T'ang Chün-i pointed out, Confucian enlightenment in that he felt at one with the physical world, the realm of heaven-and-earth.²⁵⁰

As he presented it, Kao's enlightenment in 1594 contrasts with the well-known enlightenment experience of Wang Yang-ming in 1508. Wang was in life-threatening exile among the aborigines in Kweichow; Kao was at an inn on an established water route in Fukien. Wang heard a voice in the deep of the night and attained a new insight. While looking at the scenery and holding a book with the thoughts of the Ch'eng brothers, Kao perceived (*chien*) what Ch'eng Hao meant. Wang's realization (that we must investigate our

248 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingjuhsüeh an*, 58, pp. 1400-01. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 236-38. Kao's account of his trip to Kwangtung is translated in Rodney Taylor, "The centered self: Religious autobiography in the neo-Confucian tradition," *History of Religions*, 17 (1978), pp. 276-81. Also in Rodney Taylor, "The cultivation of sagehood as a religious goal in neo-Confucianism: A study of selected writings of Kao P'an-lung" (Diss., Columbia University, 1974), pp. 178-84. Excerpts are trans. in Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, pp. 132-40.

249 Quoted in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 310, and in T'ang Chün-i, "Lun wan Ming Tung-lin Ku Hsien-ch'eng yü Kao P'an-lung chih ju-hsüeh," *Chung-kuo hsüeh-chih*, 6 (1972), p. 555. Also trans. in Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 129, and the English sources in note 224.

250 T'ang Chün-i, "Lun wan Ming Tung-lin," pp. 556-57.

hearts, not external objects) set in train a radically new interpretation of established teachings; Kao's realization was that the effort (*kung fu*) of moral improvement depends only on, and has to come from, our own heart.²⁵¹ Kao spent only a few, generally enjoyable, months in Kwangtung before being granted a leave of absence from the government to return home to Wu-hsi. Over the next twenty-five years, he sought to revive for his contemporaries the old moral message of the Learning of the Way.

During his first years as an official, Kao had made extracts from the works of the Ch'eng brothers and Chu Hsi and from one of their most devoted early Ming followers, Hsüeh Hsüan. At that same time, Kao attracted some notice for his memorial arguing against the proposal by Chang Shih-ts'e (*chin-shih* in 1574) that his annotation of the Great Learning (*Ta hsüeh*) be granted imperial sanction to replace Chu Hsi's because, according to Chang Shih-ts'e, the moral climate in the Sung dynasty had been ruined by Ch'eng-Chu teachings. After he left office in 1595, Kao sought in retirement to observe the regimen prescribed by Chu Hsi for meditating half the day and reading the other half. Kao continued to go over the classics and the texts of the Learning of the Way from Sung. By 1602 he had compiled fourteen *chüan* of notes on Chu Hsi and, the next year, completed his annotation of a famous essay by Chang Tsai.²⁵² In 1605 he wrote an essay against the claims made for Buddhism by a literatus who had become a monk.²⁵³

Of greater consequence was Kao's suggestion to Ku Hsien-ch'eng and his brother that they establish an academy to be named Eastern Grove (*Tung-lin*) in Wu-hsi. It was opened in 1604, and Kao P'an-lung was the director from Ku Hsien-ch'eng's death in 1612 until the destruction of the Academy by imperial order in 1625. Kao's fame, and fate, and the Academy's were inextricably linked.

Like Ku Hsien-ch'eng, Kao sought to restore a sense of discipline to the literati involved with the Learning of the Way. Kao criticized Wang Yang-ming for not understanding that the crucial phrase, investigation of things (*ko wu*), was a process to be directed toward one's own heart.²⁵⁴ Kao's corrective was to argue that, as *ko wu* involved the effort of developing one's moral knowledge, moral knowledge was not simply innate, as Wang Yang-ming had taught.²⁵⁵ The effort which Kao advocated, however, still was lar-

251 Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 311.

252 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 58, p. 1399. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 234. Also *MS*, 243, p. 6311; Jung, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, pp. 301-02; Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 121; *DMB*, p. 702.

253 Kao P'an-lung, *Kao tzu i-shu* (late Ming; rpt. Taipei, 1983), 3, pp. 51b-54a. See Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," pp. 90-91.

254 *San shih chi*, quoted in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 304. Trans. in Taylor, "The cultivation of sagehood," pp. 192-264.

255 See Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 123.

gely concerned with one's own heart. Like Chu Hsi, Kao put effort into meditating as well as reading books, but the primary objects of inquiry for Kao, as for Hsüeh Hsüan, were the goodness of one's nature and the heart-in-itself, not the plants and trees of the phenomenal world external to our hearts.²⁵⁶ Kao's method of learning placed more emphasis on reverence (*ching*) and quiescence (*ching*) than the accumulation of knowledge about the phenomenal world.²⁵⁷ Through quietly sitting in meditation we are able, in Ku's view, to investigate things.²⁵⁸ By meditating, our hearts can be brought into accord with the coherence of the whole world (*t'ien li*), although, except perhaps for sages, it is not a spontaneous process.²⁵⁹ For Kao, freeing one's heart is not enough. One has to make the effort to implement the goodness which is in our natures as humans. In all of this, Kao P'an-lung is not far from the teachings of Wang Yang-ming. In spite of his own attempts to distinguish himself from Wang, Kao's dissent was from his contemporaries' interpretation of innate moral knowing as the basis of a kind of individualism and not from Wang's view that we can find the coherence (or principles) of morality in our hearts (or minds).

An insightful criticism of Kao was made by Huang Tsung-hsi, who was not unsympathetic to him. Ostensibly Kao's learning "was based entirely on Ch'eng-Chu teachings, and consequently he regarded 'investigation of things' as important. But in the Ch'eng-Chu interpretation of 'investigation of things' the heart (*hsin*) is in command of the self (*shen*), coherence [or principle] is distributed in all the ten thousand things [and not just in the heart], and the tasks of 'preserving one's heart' (*ts'um hsin*) and 'fathoming coherence' (*ch'üing li*) must proceed conjointly. However, Kao's saying, 'To turn inward and seek it in one's own self as soon as one knows something is to be able truly to investigate things' is quite similar to Yang Shih's saying, 'When one turns inward to one's self and is fully realized, then all of the [so called external] things of the world are there in him.' This is quite different from the point in Ch'eng-Chu teachings. Kao's saying, 'When a man's mind is clear it just is the coherence of heaven', and 'Fathoming to the utmost without any falsity *is* coherence' are implicitly abetting Wang Yang-ming's theory of 'extending innate moral knowing,' but Kao said that for those who chatter about 'innate moral knowing,' the extension of that knowing does not involve 'investigation of things' . . . When Kao says there is an 'extending of knowing' that does not involve 'investigating things,' to what does he

256 Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu hsiang shih*, p. 309.

257 Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 125.

258 Quoted in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu hsiang shih*, p. 308.

259 Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 126.

think the knowing is being extended? Consequently, if it is necessarily so that 'investigating things' is externally fathoming the coherence of affairs and things, [which is a premise Huang regarded as unacceptable,] then it could be said that Wang Yang-ming's 'extending knowing' does not involve 'investigation of things.' But it is obvious that if, as Kao says, 'When a man's heart is clear it just is the coherence of heaven,' then Wang Yang-ming's 'extending knowing' just is 'investigation of things.' Kao's view of 'investigation of things' is not worth considering. He especially wanted to distinguish himself from Wang Yang-ming, but contrary to his expectations he made more obstacles for his consciousness."²⁶⁰

Huang's criticism was on solid philosophical grounds, but it does not diminish Kao P'an-lung's intention: to re-establish moral goodness as a goal of moral self-improvement and to reject the fashionable teachings that goodness is spontaneously within our hearts or that our true hearts are beyond good and evil. Kao's words in praise of Ts'ao Tuan, an early Ming follower of Chu Hsi's teachings, can be applied to Kao himself: "no new or unusual theories."²⁶¹ Kao was trying to push the pendulum from its swing toward Wang Yang-ming, innate moral knowing, and an individualistic heart determining or transcending good and evil, back toward Chu Hsi, investigation of things, and a heart which could be intentionally developed to do good and eschew evil in government and society at large, even at the risk of death.²⁶²

Kao did good. He endowed land for the poor and organized a local charitable society (*t'ung shan hui*) for the needy. He tutored students at the Tung-lin Academy. He participated in discourses on learning at other academies in Chiang-nan.²⁶³ He practiced meditation and led a scrupulously moral life. In his sixtieth year Kao accepted an appointment to office at Peking under the new emperor. A number of his associates who had been out of office since the mid-1590s, including Tsou Yüan-piao, Feng Ts'ung-wu and Chao Nan-hsing, also returned to the government. Kao participated in the establishment of the Shou-shan Academy at the capital in 1622 and, the following year, his request to retire was allowed. He went back to Wu-hsi and the Tung-lin Academy.

Before the year was out, Kao was recalled to be a Vice Minister of Justice. Prior to his arrival in the capital, in the summer of 1624 his student, Yang Lien, as a censor, submitted a memorial denouncing the twenty-four crimes

260 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 58, p. 1402. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 240.

261 Kao P'an-lung, *Kao tzu i-shu*, 5, p. 23, quoted in Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 304.

262 See T'ang Chün-i, "Lun wan Ming Tung-lin Ku Hsien-ch'eng yü Kao P'an-lung chih ju hsüeh," p. 562.

263 *DMB*, pp. 703-04.

of the eunuch Wei Chung-hsien. In the autumn, Kao was persuaded to accept appointment as censor-in-chief. In that capacity, he recommended the removal of Ts'ui Ch'eng-hsiu because of his corruption as a salt administrator. The recommendation was supported by Chao Nan-hsing, who was serving as the Minister of Personnel. Ts'ui sought help from Wei Chung-hsien. Kao and Chao were dismissed from office and Wei's purge of Tung-lin elements began in earnest, first with dismissals and then, in the summer of 1625, with the arrests and death in prison of six Tung-lin partisans, including Yang Lien.

The following spring, the arrests of Kao P'an-lung and six others were ordered. Kao wrote a memorial explaining that, although he had been reduced to commoner status, he had served as a high official, and rather than accept the disgrace to his dynasty of one of its high ministers being disgraced by arrest, he must commit suicide. In the middle of the night, Kao drowned himself in a pond. Shortly thereafter the Tung-lin Academy in Wu-hsi was completely demolished.²⁶⁴

More because of his lengthy leadership of the Tung-lin Academy and the circumstances of his death than because of the philosophical merits of his ideas, Kao P'an-lung was described later in the seventeenth century as undoubtedly one of the two great Confucians in the eyes of "those who understood learning."²⁶⁵ Kao's collected works in 12 *chüan* were printed in 1632. Huang Tsung-hsi remembered reading through them immediately with his teacher, who pointed out to Huang the pervasive Buddhist influences in Kao's thinking. Tsou Yüan-piao and Feng Ts'ung-wu also had been perceived as too influenced by Ch'an teachings. Huang's teacher, for that matter, also regarded Chu Hsi as under Ch'an influence. The teacher, whom Huang said was ranked along with Kao P'an-lung as the other great Confucian of the time, was Liu Tsung-chou.

Liu Tsung-chou (1578–1645) represents the culmination of the attempts in late Ming to provide an interpretation of the Learning of the Way which both would avoid the individualistic excesses of the claims that the basis of morality is to be found in each person's own heart and also would motivate each person to develop the discipline to do good as a way of life. Liu achieved both in his own person, even though, like Kao P'an-lung, his suicide revealed the final frustration of a moral man's being overwhelmed by external political events.

Liu was born in Shan-yin in Chekiang, which also was the home district of Wang Chi and Chou Ju-teng. Wang Chi died in 1583. Chou retired to Shao-

²⁶⁴ Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 132.

²⁶⁵ According to Huang Tsung-hsi, Huang Tsung-hsi, *Mingjüshieh an*, 1507. Cf. Ching, *Records*, p. 253, and Busch, "Tung-lin Academy," p. 132.

hsing in 1597, and his teaching of Wang Chi's negative interpretation was influential as Liu was growing up. Liu's father died before Liu was born, and his childhood was often difficult. He and his mother were helped by her father, and his education was primarily the result of his mother's family's support.²⁶⁶ He eventually married one of his mother's nieces. Liu became a preparatory student (*t'ung-sheng*) in 1595, passed the prefectural examination at Shao-hsing in 1597, and went to Hangchow in the fall for the provincial examination, which he passed on his first attempt.²⁶⁷ Liu failed the metropolitan examination the next spring, and then was at home for three years with an eye ailment. In 1600 he went back to Peking to prepare at the Imperial Academy. In the spring of 1601 he passed the *chin-shih* examinations and immediately learned that his mother had already died back in Chekiang.²⁶⁸

Liu went home and imposed a painful mourning period on himself.²⁶⁹ In 1603, he went to Hu-kuang to call on Hsü Fu-yüan (1535–1604) at Te-ch'ing. He asked Hsü to write an account of his mother's life, and he also asked him about the essentials of learning. In Nanking, in the early 1590s, Hsü had challenged Chou Ju-teng and the negative interpretation at a meeting for discourses on learning. Now, in 1603, he told the young Liu Tsung-chou that the two main tasks in learning were preserving heaven's coherence in one's nature and restraining one's human desires. At this encounter, Liu formally recognized Hsü Fu-yüan as his teacher and for the rest of his life sought to implement these two goals.²⁷⁰

The next year, Liu's mourning period for his mother was over, and at the urging of his relatives, he went to Peking and accepted an assignment to an official post. He was appointed a messenger (*hsing-jen*), and with little to do, he found time to take lessons in playing the zither from a Taoist priest while he was staying at the Ling-chi Temple, site of famous discourses on learning half a century earlier. More importantly, Liu began to read about governmental affairs during the dynasty.²⁷¹ (In a similar position a decade earlier, Kao P'an-lung had spent his time reading the Sung philosophers.) Liu began to articulate an institutionally informed point of view which applied the highest personal moral standards to the current holders of high office, including the emperor. Before he had served in office for six months, Liu drafted an ineffectual memorial criticizing the reigning grand secretary, Shen I-kuan (d. 1616). Liu resigned early the next year (1605) and went home for seven

266 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'u* (Shanghai, 1934), pp. 13 and 16.

267 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'u*, pp. 24–26.

268 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'u*, pp. 28–31.

269 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'u*, pp. 31–32.

270 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'u*, p. 33.

271 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'u*, pp. 34–35.

years.²⁷² This was to be the pattern of his relation to government service: a year or two at most in office and then several years at home to devote himself to writing, reading books, and meditating.

Whether in or out of office, Liu pursued his vision of good government with lengthy memorials and, in the 1630s, interviews with the emperor, all to the effect that sincere moral effort on the part of the emperor and all officials worth employing would save the empire from its troubles. He dismissed talk of such things as firearms or harsh punishments as diversionary.²⁷³ With no more than a total of four years of actual government service, Liu nevertheless was promoted to be governor of Peking (in 1629), a Vice Minister (in 1636), and censor-in-chief (in 1642). The Ch'ung-chen Emperor repeatedly thought of appointing him as a grand secretary, in spite of Liu's face to face admonitions to him about his failures as a ruler. Such was the reputation for moral rectitude that Liu Tsung-chou built.

Liu visited the Tung-lin Academy in 1612 and met Kao P'an-lung.²⁷⁴ Liu sided with Tung-lin partisans against other factions and he helped with the establishment of the Shou-shan Academy when he was in Peking in 1622.²⁷⁵ In 1631, he began to join in discourses on learning in Shan-yin and organized regular meetings.²⁷⁶ But Liu repeatedly expressed his misgivings about such organized efforts. His own reputation was not derived from his joining with other literati.

Liu was a prolific writer, but as Jung Chao-tsu observed, there is nothing strikingly new in Liu's thought.²⁷⁷ He was a powerful thinker, but his was an effort at salvage. Like Ku Hsien-ch'eng and Kao P'an-lung, Liu Tsung-chou sought to move his contemporaries away from the idea that goodness was spontaneous (*tz'u jan*) and back to a commitment to moral effort. Kao had made being reverent (*ching*) and quiescent (*ching*) into a slogan. Liu's motto for true learning was vigilance in solitude (*shen tu*).²⁷⁸

Liu went back to the phrase from the *Great learning* about making the will authentic (*ch'eng i*) and argued that will or volition, in practice, has priority over heart or mind. In other words, we can put our innate moral knowing (as taught by Wang Yang-ming and accepted by Liu Tsung-chou) into prac-

272 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'ü*, pp. 36–37.

273 See Huang Tsung-hsi's summary of Liu Tsung-chou's memorials and interviews in Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, 62, pp. 1508–11. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 255–59.

274 Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 324; and Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'ü*, p. 45.

275 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'ü*, pp. 98–99.

276 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'ü*, pp. 175–76.

277 Jung Chao-tsu, *Ming tai ssu-hsiang shih*, p. 334. T'ang Chün-i, "Liu Tsung-chou's doctrine of moral mind and practice and his critique of Wang Yang-ming," in *Unfolding of neo-Confucianism*, ed. de Bary, p. 326, judged that Liu went a step further than Ku and Kao.

278 I have adopted Ching's translation. See her *Records*, p. 262. Also see Yao Ming-ta, *Liu Tsung-chou nien-p'ü*, p. 184. The phrase *shen-tu* is drawn from *Chung yung*, ch. 1, and *Ta hsüeh*, ch. 6.

tice only by willing the knowing of good and evil, the liking of good and disliking of evil, and the doing of good and not doing evil.²⁷⁹ Liu shifted the focus of moral effort from heart to will, and his motto can be glossed as “taking care of the absolute good will in solitude” as well as in all one’s involvements with others.²⁸⁰ Demoting the status of heart, making it less central, Liu offered his own revision of Wang Yang-ming’s “Four sentences”: (1) The activity of the heart is sometimes good and sometimes evil. (2) The will abides in liking good and disliking evil. (3) Innate moral knowing is knowing good and evil. (4) The coherence of things is good without evil.²⁸¹ Liu tried to persuade his contemporaries to discipline their wills so as to be content with doing good. He used his own life to set a moral example.

Liu Tsung-chou’s effort to rescue his world was overwhelmed by the fall of the Ming dynasty. He went to Nanking in 1644 to take office as censor-in-chief in the newly formed government there, but immediately he chastized the most powerful officials who wanted to enhance their restoration efforts with his prestige. Liu resigned and went home. When his province was invaded by Ch’ing armies in 1645, Liu told his followers that, when Peking fell in the spring of 1644, he did not choose to die because he was merely a commoner, having been removed from the register of officials, and when Nanking fell, he did not choose to die because the emperor ran away and he did not hold office, but now, his homeland was falling, and he was choosing to die with it. Liu stopped eating and died after twenty days.²⁸² Ming loyalist resistance to the Ch’ing in Chekiang flared briefly.²⁸³

Liu Tsung-chou’s death marked an end. Of course, he had followers, but as his most eminent student, Huang Tsung-hsi, pointed out, many of them at the academy in Shan-yin at which Liu taught became deeply involved in Buddhism.²⁸⁴ Although he remained empathetic to the Learning of the Way, Huang himself went on to be more a historian than an arbiter of morality.²⁸⁵ It is ironic that Liu’s remained an individualist (*tzu li*) solution to the problem of identifying a moral learning for literati.

279 See T’ang Chün-i, “Liu Tsung-chou’s doctrine,” p. 323.

280 T’ang Chün-i, “Liu Tsung-chou’s doctrine,” p. 324.

281 Liu Tsung-chou, *Liu tzu-ch’üan shu* (1824; rpt. Taipei, 1968), 10, p. 26. Cf. T’ang Chün-i, “Liu Tsung-chou’s doctrine,” p. 324. For a different interpretation of Liu’s four sentences, see Wei-ming Tu, “Subjectivity in Liu Tsung-chou’s philosophical anthropology.” In *Individualism and holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist values*, ed. Donald J. Munro (Ann Arbor, 1985), p. 226.

282 See Ching, *Records*, p. 261. Yao, *Liu nien-p’u*, pp. 336–37, 341.

283 Yao Ming-ta, *Liu nien-p’u*, p. 342.

284 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsieh an*, 62, p. 1512. Cf. Ching, *Records*, pp. 261–62.

285 T’ang Chün-i, “Liu Tsung-chou’s doctrine,” p. 327, said that we can easily understand the transition from Liu to Huang. In my view it was a profound transformation.

OTHER ENDEAVORS IN LEARNING BY LITERATI AS CONFUCIANS

At the end of the Ming period, the Learning of the Way originally systematized by Chu Hsi remained the officially sanctioned doctrine for the purposes of education and examinations. After more than a century of thinking, talking, and writing about interpretative subtleties, thousands of literati had also been influenced by the repercussions of Wang Yang-ming's and others' reconsiderations of the foundation and implementation of moral philosophy, but the discussions remained within the framework established in the Learning of the Way. No consensus emerged in support of a single alternative system of ideas which would replace the much criticized teachings attributed to Chu Hsi. Any individual thinker who strayed or dissented from these teachings could be subject to the charge of having passed out of an ill-defined boundary of the main stream (*ta tuan*) and become involved in a different, other strand (*i tuan*) of learning. Confidence and even interest in Chu Hsi's ideas had eroded, but the textual agenda he set in the form of the Four Books, and particularly the "Great Learning" and the "Mean," continued to provide conceptual categories for the moral philosophy of literati at large.

Who were "Confucians" in late Ming?

There was no precise, universally acceptable or applicable definition of *ju*. By the beginning of the Ming dynasty, the system for registering households as *ju*, as a category mainly to denominate certain types of educational and ritual specialists serving the state, had ceased its function.²⁸⁶ By emphasizing the dominance of the Learning of the Way even through the sixteenth century with its proliferation of interpretations, I have construed the meaning of *ju* narrowly. This more or less follows what Huang Tsung-hsi did in selecting his examples of individual Confucians (*ju*) and their texts for inclusion in his *Source Book of Ming Confucians* (*Ming ju hsüeh an*). He included more than 200 thinkers, and later historians (including me) have generally followed his lead in accepting them as Confucians.

There are two significant implications of this relatively narrow application of the label confucian (*ju*). One is that, not overlooking Huang Tsung-hsi's attempt to vindicate the presumption that "our hearts" (*wu hsin*) are the loci for apprehending the coherence (*li*) which is the basis of all moral understand-

286 See Wang Yü-ch'uan, "Some Salient Features of the Ming Labor Service System," *Ming Studies*, 21 (1986), pp. 1-44. I leave aside a special set of persons who, by definition, were assigned the category of *ju*: learned lineal descendants of early sages such as Confucius, Mencius, and some disciples, and also of the leading masters who initiated the Learning of the Way in Sung, including, of course, the Ch'eng brothers and Chu Hsi. They were included in the "Ju lin" section in *MS*, 284, pp. 7295-305.

ing and action,²⁸⁷ there were critical differences of interpretation which no one had the final authority to arbitrate. At the same time that Huang Tsung-hsi remained confident that the Way taught and lived by true Confucians (*ju*) was correct and unitary, he recognized that all sorts of divergent paths had been pursued.²⁸⁸ One of his purposes in assembling a book with a wide array of divergent opinions, many of which he explicitly sought to refute in his own remarks, was to reveal where many Ming Confucians had started to go astray. This is a recurrent theme in his section of what he called the T'ai-chou thinkers, but, significantly, Huang Tsung-hsi did not rule all erroneous thinkers out of his category of being Confucians (*ju*). He acknowledged their quest for correct teachings, even when they did not (in his judgment) succeed.

In effect, there was no certainty about what constituted "correct" teaching or doctrine; there was no orthodoxy. There were the state-sanctioned texts and interpretations of the Learning of the Way for certain functions; simultaneously, there were alternative interpretations and emphases, exemplified by, but not limited to, Wang Yang-ming's diverse followers. In other words, an important negative implication of our following Huang Tsung-hsi's lead when looking at Ming thinkers is that we have a rather large set of Confucians (*ju*) as individuals and even groups without our (or their) being able to determine that they shared a bounded, noncontradictory, defining doctrine (presumably to be called "Confucianism") because they themselves disagreed.

We could choose not to follow Huang and instead construe the meaning of "Confucians" broadly. We could presume that by Confucians we might mean all of the literati (*shih*), the learned elite who had acquired high levels of compositional skills in writing essays based on the established texts and interpretations of the Learning of the Way.²⁸⁹ By this definition, all civil officials also are Confucians. There are two considerations which detract from the utility of this presumption. One is that we have no means of determining what most literati as individuals thought – they left no relevant writing. The other is that we know that many literati – if Confucians in the broad sense here – showed strong personal involvement in what are clearly "other" teachings with definable doctrines, such as Buddhism and Christianity. By late Ming, literati patronage of Buddhist clerics, institutions, ideas, and practices was a public means of enhancing the local status of oneself and

287 See Huang's opening sentences in the 1693 preface to the *Ming ju hsüeh an*, p. 7 – not translated in Ching, *Records of Ming Scholars*.

288 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsüeh an*, p. 7.

289 It is worth noting that some Chinese dictionaries, the great *T'z'u hai* for example, give "literati who have the Learning of the Way" as a definition of *ju*.

one's family without compromising being a literatus.²⁹⁰ Thus the broad definition of all literati as "Confucians" leaves us in the conceptually untidy position of recognizing that, in late Ming, being a Confucian did not entail believing, embracing, or practicing a determinate set of ideas which are readily labeled as the "doctrine" of "body of thought" of "Confucianism."

The broad definition reminds us that in following Huang Tsung-hsi's usage we perforce exclude some influential literati – Chang Chü-cheng and Li Chih are two prominent examples – from being Confucians because he excluded them from his selection. Here we have the second significant implication of following Huang Tsung-hsi in adopting a narrow meaning for Confucians (*ju*): it arbitrarily excludes many authors who were unconcerned with discoursing on the foundation, apprehension, and implementation of morality on the terms set by the Learning of the Way, and who were more concerned with other types of intellectual endeavors which clearly were not Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, or Christian. Were they Confucians? Did they contribute to "Confucianism"?

Literati endeavors not involving the Learning of the Way

Literati pursued three major classes of intellectual endeavor which were distinguishable from direct involvement in the issues of the Learning of the Way and which consequently were excluded from Huang Tsung-hsi's compilation, *Source book of Ming Confucians*, but which were nevertheless regarded as normal (although not normative) for literati by their contemporaries in late Ming. The three classes are (1) literary and artistic pursuits coming under the rubric of cultural endeavors (*wen* or *wen hsüeh*), including calligraphy, painting, and other refined arts as well as writing poetry and prose; (2) history writing and associated works on statecraft (*ching shih*); and (3) what may be broadly called exegetical scholarship or textual studies. In earlier periods, at least some versions of these three types of writing had been regarded as expressions of Confucian learning, but with the success of the system attributed to Chu Hsi, they were, in effect, marginalized by Ming times. They were not "other strands" (*i tuan*), but neither were they regarded as the "main stream" (*ta tuan*) of Confucian concerns, or as contributing directly to what we might call "Confucian doctrine."

290 See Timothy Brook, *Praying for power: Buddhism and the formation of gentry society in late Ming China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), pp. 15–29. Brook refers to the *shih* as "gentry."

Literary and artistic pursuits

In late Ming times, literati of all descriptions continued to write poems, and thousands of them have been preserved, along with a myriad of shorter prose pieces.²⁹¹ The extreme judgment conveyed by Huang Tsung-hsi, that Ming literary works did not measure up to those of earlier dynasties,²⁹² although it lives on in various versions even today, may be set aside as unprovable and irrelevant here. In late Ming, composing poetry and short prose pieces and producing calligraphy for display, and even paintings, were comfortably within the competence of many literati and, collectively, they were prolific.²⁹³ Such endeavors did not compromise their standing as degree holders, appointed officials, or Confucians (*ju* in the broad sense). For many literati, these were means to achieve or enhance their reputations, a motive which also attracted literati to engage in discourses on learning and to participate in the literary societies both large and small which proliferated through the late Ming in all parts of the empire. For a few, however, such creative endeavors were the defining interest in their lives; in the sixteenth century and since, the most prominent of them were called *wen jen*, which may be glossed as “men committed to cultural pursuits” and translated inadequately as “literary men.”²⁹⁴ They were a social type. They were not picked out as Confucians (*ju*) in Ming times. They made claims about their endeavors which put them in intellectual competition with literati involved in doctrinal discourses on the Learning of the Way.

A prominent example of a “literary man” is Wang Shih-chen (1526–90). One of the most prolific writers of the Ming period, Wang was from a district near Soochow, the seat of the “literary man” (*wen jen*) style. The grandson and son of *chih-shih* degree holders, he, in turn, passed the highest examinations in 1547 and, while serving in office in the northern capital over the next decade, he began building a reputation as a leading figure in the poetry circles there. He later placed some of the blame for his political troubles on his early fame as a writer. Wang’s career took a turn when his father was executed in 1560 for a military defeat. Thereafter, Wang had long stays at home, with occasional interruptions for travel and terms in office; he reached

291 The anthology, *Ming Shih tsung*, compiled by Chu I-tsun in early Ch’ing, has poems by more than 3,000 authors.

292 Huang Tsung-hsi, “Fa-fan,” in *MJHA*, p. 17. Trans. in Julia Ching, *Records*, p. 45.

293 A convenient review of “the late Ming literary repertoire” is in A. H. Plaks, *The four masterworks of the Ming novel* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 25–49, which discusses developments in writing in several genres of poetry, prose, literary theory, drama, and fiction.

294 As a translation, “literary men” (and also “men of letters” and “literati” which are used by some for *wen jen*) glosses over the involvement of *wen jen* in nonverbal arts, particularly painting. The style of aesthetic known as *wen jen hua* was dominant through the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century.

a high-ranking position in Nanking in the last year of his life.²⁹⁵ Wang Shih-chen's efforts went into writing. His essays and jottings on current events, recent history, calligraphy, painting, garden design, and much else, including, of course, poetry, fill hundreds of *chüan*. He represented himself as the second best, if not the best, poet and writer of his age. For the last twenty years of his life, he was certainly the leading literary light, with dozens of disciples and with a marked unwillingness to become involved with his fellow graduate of 1547, the grand secretary, Chang Chü-cheng.²⁹⁶

As a "literary man" (*wen jen*), Wang Shih-chen presented a challenge to contemporary adherents of the Learning of the Way. First, as proponents of antique models of writing (*kuwen*), Wang and his associated masters of poetry and prose drew on the authority of the cultural tradition as it flourished centuries prior to the Ch'eng brothers and Chu Hsi. Wang's disciple, Hu Ying-lin (1551–1602), who failed repeatedly in the metropolitan examinations and was a better book collector and bibliophile than a poet, defended the category of "literary man:" "Others say that there was no such thing as 'literary men' in high antiquity and that there is no such thing as the 'literary model' in the Classics. I hold that no one exceeds the literary men of high antiquity and no literary model is superior to that in the Classics."²⁹⁷ Second, Wang Shih-chen and other "literary men" took the position that cultural endeavors (*wen*) should have primacy, even over the Learning of the Way.²⁹⁸ The tension between the two approaches had been apparent at the end of the Northern Sung period, but Ch'eng I's suspicions and later, Chu Hsi's prejudices, prevailed against the claims for the primacy of *wen* as creative contributions to the cultural tradition. In late Ming, the tension was revived. Wang Shih-chen's preference is distilled in the perhaps apocryphal account of him during his final illness as he was devotedly reading the works of Su Shih, the great Northern Sung advocate of *wen*, cultural creativity, as the means of actualizing the Way.²⁹⁹ Third, and most importantly, leading poets of the sixteenth century deviated from the Learning of the Way by allowing an important place for sentiment (*ch'ing*) as a source or inspiration of good poetry.

Ch'ing is variously understood and translated as sentiment, feeling, emotion, passion, and love, among other terms, and it also has the meaning of par-

295 *MS*, 287, pp. 7379–81. Also *DMB*, pp. 1399–404. Wang Shih-chen was not accorded an entry by Huang Tsung-hsi in the *Source book of Ming Confucians*.

296 Yoshikawa Kojirō, *Gen Min shi gaisetsu* (Tokyo, 1963), pp. 207–8. Translated in John Timothy Wixted, *Five hundred years of Chinese poetry 1150–1650* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 164–65.

297 Hu Ying-lin, *Shi sou* (Shanghai, 1958), p. 2. Also trans. in David Rolston, *How to read a Chinese novel* (Princeton, 1990), p. 15.

298 Yoshikawa Kojirō stressed this point. See *Gen Min shi gaisetsu*, p. 216. Also see Wixted, *Five hundred years*, pp. 172–73.

299 *MS*, 287, p. 7381. Also cited in Yoshikawa, p. 212 (Wixted, p. 169), and in *DMB*, p. 1403.

ticular situations or conditions, which are the bases of the perceptions which stimulate the sentiments within us. (Related to the second meaning is the idea of *ch'i*, unusual or strange, which represented a style of literati interest that was in vogue throughout the sixteenth century.) Affirmation of the role of *ch'ing* directly challenged the standard interpretation of two of the central terms in Chu Hsi's Learning of the Way: human nature (*hsing*) and coherence (*li*). The established interpretation of human nature by definition excluded sentiment and desire. By focusing investigation or intellectual inquiry on coherence in its universal and moral aspects, the particular and unique are rendered unimportant. And to the extent that Wang Yang-ming and his followers interpreted heart (*hsin*, or mind) as universal and moral, rather than individual and experiential, they also leave aside sentiment (*ch'ing*).³⁰⁰ The revaluation of human sentiments as a means of revising the understanding of human nature thus had implications for Confucian learning in late Ming. In reply to a question about why he did not join in the discourses on the Learning of the Way, the great playwright T'ang Hsien-tsu (1550–1616) claimed that he actually did; it was just that he focused on sentiments (*ch'ing*), while others discoursed on human nature (*hsing*).³⁰¹ T'ang Hsien-tsu also argued, in contrast to Chu Hsi's position, that there is more to understanding our world than apprehending the coherence (*li*) of things; apart from coherence, there is the neglected realm of sentiments (*ch'ing*) which T'ang explored in his plays.³⁰² The prefaces to the 1630s compilation entitled *Ch'ing shih* (*Histories of sentiments*) claim with some hyperbole that *ch'ing* is a central teaching in the Confucian classics and, properly understood, is the basis of morality.³⁰³ The problem of how to think about *ch'ing* in both the sense of sentiments and of particular situations – whether positive or negative – was explored in the plays, short stories, and novels that were printed in such variety and quality from the 1590s on. In many of these writings, concepts drawn from Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions are intermingled. However, in affirming not just the importance, but the concrete, real qualities (rather than the illusory character) of *ch'ing* in both senses, the authors of these writings and the readers they attracted, literati all, were redirecting the shared

300 On the revived emphasis on sentiments by literary men in late Ming and its putative connection to Wang Yang-ming's emphasis on *hsin* (as "heart" more than as "mind"), see Lu K'an, "Shih lun Ming tai wen-i li-lun chung te chu ch'ing shuo," in *Wen hsüeh lun chi*, 7 (Peking, 1984), pp. 165–80.

301 According to Ch'en Chi-ju in his 1623 preface to T'ang's *Mu-tan t'ing*. In T'ang Hsien-tsu, *Mu tan t'ing* (Shanghai, 1959), p. 4. Also cited in Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and disenchantment: Love and illusion in Chinese literature* (Princeton, 1993), p. 60.

302 T'ang Hsien-tsu, "Ti tz'u," his 1598 prefatory remarks, *Mu tan t'ing*, p. 1. Also cited in Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment*, pp. 50–51.

303 Feng Meng-lung, *Ch'ing shih lei-lueh* (Ch'ang-sha, 1984), prefaces pp. 1–3. Also cited in Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment*, pp. 91–92 and trans. in Hua-yuan Li Mowry, *Chinese love stories from the Ching shih* (Hamden, Conn., 1983), pp. 12–14.

ideas of literati away from the Learning of the Way, even when the lesson of the story or novel was taken to be that excessive involvement in *ch'ing* inevitably leads to disasters; merely by reading such writings, a literatus engaged the realm of sentiments.³⁰⁴ All these literary and artistic endeavors, however, were not usually understood by contemporaries as directly contributing to Confucian learning.

Writings about history

Writing and compiling others' writings about political history was a related type of intellectual endeavor in which literati in late Ming could engage without compromising their standing as Confucians (*ju*) in the broad sense.³⁰⁵ Wang Shih-chen, an example of a "literary man" (*wen jen*), wrote extensively on recent history, including a set of fifteen biographies of grand secretaries. The style of many of the historical writings like Wang Shih-chen's, however useful they were as sources for later scholars, tended to be rather informal and intentionally original, even idiosyncratic, in interpretation.³⁰⁶ Wang also wrote "ancient texts" himself and saw them passed off to his contemporaries as recently discovered historical documents; their being mistaken as authentic only served to show, in Wang's view, that he and other authors were extremely well-versed in the spirit and style of ancient texts (*ku wen*).³⁰⁷ Perhaps such inventive attitudes toward the past were symptomatic; the Ming period witnessed no figure comparable to the great historians of the T'ang, Sung, and Ch'ing dynasties. When, in the 1590s, the government initiated the compilation of a history of the dynasty (*kuo shih*), the project quickly collapsed, although it led to some privately sponsored publications on Ming history.³⁰⁸ The most notable examples are Chiao Hung's 120 *chuan* of biographies and six *chuan* on Ming bibliography.³⁰⁹

Writings which sought to use historical materials as a means of influencing the course of government were an indirect challenge to the Learning of the Way, which gave priority to moral cultivation of the individual, even the

304 The nonillusory quality of *ch'ing* was stressed in Feng Meng-lung, preface *Ch'ing shih lei-lüeh*, p. 1. The interrelation between sentiments or passions as "substance" (*sh'ih*) and beauty as "function" (*yung*) is adumbrated as a main theme at the beginning of the first chapter of the late Ming *wen jen* novel par excellence, the *Chin P'ing Mei*. See *The Plum in the golden vase*, trans. David Tod Roy (Princeton, 1993), p. 12.

305 For a general survey, see Wolfgang Franke, "Historical writing during the Ming," *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, pp. 726–82. Franke noted that, in late Ming, "a more critical attitude toward source materials" became evident, p. 726.

306 See Franke, "Historical writing," pp. 730–31.

307 Wang Shih-chen, *I yüan chih yen*, ch. 2, p. 9a.

308 See Franke, "Historical writing," p. 746.

309 Edward Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung*, pp. 55–56. Franke, "Historical writing," p. 761.

emperor, based on the universal goodness of coherence (*li*), rather than to pragmatic institutional reform. Ch'iu Chün's monumental *Supplement to the Elaboration of the Meanings of the Great Learning* (*Ta-hsüeh yen-i pu*) of 1487 served through the sixteenth century as a major repository of practicable policies and advice written within a framework set by the morally authoritative text, the "Great Learning."³¹⁰

Even before Chang Chü-cheng's death in 1582 and the accumulating sense that the government was not coping with the turmoil in the empire, but especially after that sense spread, there was a noticeable trend of producing books of advice for local and higher level officials based on Ming officials' writings. For example, Feng Ying-ching (1555–1606), a 1592 *chin-shih* who was imprisoned for resisting the expropriative collection of silver by the emperor's agents, culled selections from Ming memorials to make twenty-eight *chüan* which he titled *A practicable compendium on statecraft* (*Ching-shih shih-yung pien*).³¹¹ At about the same time, Tsou Kuan-kuang (1556–c. 1620), who was associated with the leaders of the Tung-lin Academy, compiled an updating of Ch'iu Chün's book.³¹² The proposals in these compilations tended to be modest in scope and piecemeal in applicability, without a larger ideological agenda and thus, have been described as accommodative statecraft.³¹³

In the 1630s, a massive collection of classified Ming writings was assembled to provide a convenient resource for officials. The 508 *chüan* of the *Compendium of writings on statecraft* (*Ching-shih wen pien*) included thousands of items by approximately 500 writers since the beginning of the dynasty. The primary compiler was Ch'en Tzu-lung (1608–47). He had entered mourning for his

310 Chu Hung-lam, "Ch'iu Chün's *Ta-hsüeh yen-i pu* and its influence in the sixteenth and seventh centuries," *Ming Studies*, 22 (1986), pp. 7–10, reviews the publication history of Ch'iu's book as well as its abridgements. Huang Tsung-hsi did not include Ch'iu Chün in his *Source book of Ming Confucians*.

311 *MS*, 237, p. 6176. See William S. Atwell, "Ch'en Tzu-lung (1608–47): A scholar-official of the late Ming" (Diss., Princeton University, 1974), pp. 82–3, for some other titles of statecraft compilations produced in late Ming. An index of topics in eleven compilations of statecraft writings from the Ming is in Mindaishi kenkyu iinkai, *Mindai keiseibun bunrui moku-roku* (Tokyo, 1986).

312 Chu Hung-lam, "Ch'iu Chün's *Ta-hsüeh yen-i pu* and its influence," p. 13.

313 See Thomas Metzger, et al., "Ching-shih thought and the societal changes of the late Ming and early Ch'ing periods." In *Chin-shih Chung-kuo ching-shih ssu-hsiang yen-i'ao hui lun-wen chi*, ed. Chung-yang yen-chiu yüan chin-tai shih yen-chiu so (Taipei, 1984), pp. 21–35. Using the term *ching-shih chih yung* broadly in the sense of practical learning, Yamanai Yu sought to portray a type of thinking under this rubric as constituting a transitional mode of learning between the previous Ming emphasis on mind (*hsin*) and the later, eighteenth-century emphasis on evidential learning (*k'ao-cheng hsüeh*). In his view socially beneficial, practicable ideas (*ching-shi*) were developed in the early seventeenth century, particularly by leading Tung-lin thinkers and their associates as well as by literati involved in the newly introduced Learning from Heaven (*i'ien hsüeh*). Most of Yamanai's examples, however, are thinkers who wrote in early Ch'ing and came to prominence only in the last third of the seventeenth century. He also leaves aside the earlier statecraft tradition, going back to Ch'iu Chun, in order to make his point. See Yamanai Yu, *Min-Shin shisōshi no kenkyū*, esp. pp. 239–66.

stepmother just after becoming a *chin-shih* in 1637 and before he could take up an official appointment.³¹⁴ During his retirement at home in Sung-chiang, Ch'en worked with some friends to assemble materials he had been collecting for several years and to incorporate extracts from other books and manuscripts which were made available to them as their efforts became known to others. They published the book in 1639. In his preface, Ch'en wrote that there were currently no government-sponsored efforts to collect a full record of Ming governance. With recruitment through examinations, there no longer were enduring hereditary houses to preserve official writings by their members for later generations. Too often, private copies of official documents were used to light fires in the kitchen. With vulgar classicists (Ch'en was referring to *ju* in a very narrow sense) more interested in antiquity than in the present, and with literati who were devoted to cultural pursuits caring more for flowery refinements than political realities (Ch'en was referring to "literary men" *wen jen*), the literati as a whole were lacking substantive learning (*shih hsiieh*). Ch'en was stressing the practicality of his compilation. It had selections of documents discussing defense of the borders, fiscal practices, and other essential state information. Therefore, in his preface, Ch'en posed the question, should these details be made freely available to others (e.g., to those employed as advisors by the Manchus)? Ch'en handled this by asserting that the Ming dynasty had never governed by stratagems; his compilation not only involved state knowledge, it also was about the practice of doing one's utmost for the dynasty, that is, being loyal (*chung*).

In contrast to Ch'iu Chün, who had a distinguished official career, Ch'en Tzu-lung and his associates were young men with little or no experience in office. Ch'en had yet to occupy a post, and his lofty reputation among his contemporaries was due to his skills in poetry and his participation in poetry societies. The *Compendium of writings on statecraft* contained specific, ad hoc information about policies, institutions, and means. It presented classified selections of historical precedents intended to inform decisions and it emphasized moral self-cultivation. Bureaucrats, in their routines as well as in their expertise, tended to prefer guidance which left issues of moral agency in the background, and accommodative statecraft was practiced at all levels of good government. History writing and, in particular, writings drawn from the past on statecraft, along with explicitly practical books of advice, such as those on agricultural technology and local administrative techniques, challenged the concerns structured by the Learning of the Way. Even though,

³¹⁴ Ch'en Tzu-lung, "Nien-p'u," appended to *Ch'en Tzu-lung shih chi* (Shanghai, 1983), pp. 653, 657, and 659. Also Chu Tung-jun, *Ch'en Tzu-lung chi ch'i shih-tai* (Shanghai, 1984), pp. 106 and 119. The fullest account in English of Ch'en Tzu-lung's career is in Atwell, "Ch'en Tzu'lung." Also see *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period*, ed. A. W. Hummel, pp. 102-03.

in early Ch'ing, history-related inquiries achieved a new importance, in the late Ming period, such writings were not construed as contributing to Confucian doctrine, however useful they were to Confucians (*ju*) serving in the imperial government. Expedience by its nature could not serve as the basis of a shared moral ideal for literati and literati-officials.

Pursuing evidence as an endeavor in learning

The alternative to the Learning of the Way (*Tao hsiieh*) which arguably began to develop in late Ming and which became most influential over the next two centuries or more had no name at the time. Later, under the Ch'ing dynasty, it came to be known as evidential or evidenced learning (*k'ao-cheng* or *k'ao-chü hsiieh*). Twentieth-century historians, although defining and appraising it in somewhat different terms, mostly begin by treating evidential learning as dominating eighteenth-century intellectual trends and contrast it to the intellectual tenor of late Ming. Broadly construed, evidential learning in Ch'ing referred to a mode of scholarly inquiry into texts, particularly, but not exclusively, classical ones that were recognized as having accrued centuries of misinterpretation as orthographies and pronunciations changed, and as commentators read in their own preconceptions. Its practitioners used a range of philological techniques rather than being narrowly exegetical and assembled contextual materials, scrutinized for relevance and reliability, to construct an argument or interpretation about the content of texts to which readers could respond on the basis of the evidence offered and to which further evidentiary material could be adduced to support or refute any particular claim.³¹⁵ Of course, written texts had been central to learning for nearly 2,000 years, and many thinkers had sought to found their claims on earlier textual authority; the eighteenth century was noteworthy for the rigor in evaluating evidence, the ardor with which it was collected, and the willingness to treat textual evidence, including the Classics inherited from the sages of antiquity, as documents with a history rather than as perfect embodiments of timeless, universal truth, or as prompts for inner faith.

The Classics had been central to Confucian learning since Han times and commentaries on the Classics continued as the established medium for advancing Confucian learning.³¹⁶ To acquire the competence to qualify as literati

315 My broad definition is drawn in part from Ch'ien Mu, *Chung'kuo chin san-pai nien hsiieh-shu shih*, pp. 134–35. For a definition which intentionally is not tied to Ch'ing scholarship, nor to any particular topics or materials, see Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsiieh yen-chiu*, 2nd ed. (Taipei, 1986), pp. 2–3. Lin sees three main aspects: assembling material, critically assessing it, and drawing conclusions by induction and deduction. with this inclusive definition, Lin can and does find *k'ao-cheng hsiieh* in nearly every historical period.

316 This point was made at the beginning of the “Ju-lin” section, *MS*, 282, p. 7221.

in late Ming times, young men memorized the Four Books and intensively studied at least one of the Five Classics and their standard commentaries related to the Learning of the Way set out by Chu Hsi. In this sense, all Ming literati were Confucian by virtue of being indoctrinated with the Learning of the Way. Those who pursued discourses on learning (*chiang hsiieh*) may be understood by extension as effecting a kind of commentary on some aspects of the Classics. However, producing detailed, systematic commentaries that had characterized Confucians' classics-based learning in the Han and T'ang dynasties was not in fashion in Ming. The compilers of the *Ming History* observed that, for over 270 years, no one gained fame for specializing in glosses on the texts of the Classics.³¹⁷ There nevertheless were a number of commentaries produced on the Four Books and Five Classics, including some by literati who were not included in Huang Tsung-hsi's *Source Book of Ming Confucians*. The grand secretary, Chang Chü-cheng, for example, wrote commentaries on the Four Books to rival Chu Hsi's, but Chang's, like most other commentaries written in Ming, focused on bringing out the correct meaning (*ta i*) rather than glossing the particular words and sentences in context to make the original language of the ancient Classics more accessible.

The most innovative Ming commentary on the *Book of changes* was the *Collected annotation on the Chou changes* (*Chou i chi chu*) by Lai Chih-te (1525–1604).³¹⁸ From Szechwan, Lai passed the provincial examination in 1552. Obeying his father's instruction, he went to the capital in 1558, but he realized he was not suited to the pursuit of success in the examinations or of a career as an official. He returned home, and after deeply mourning his father's death, Lai gave himself over to an austere life of reading in retirement. Lai had studied as a young man with a Taoist master, and he also read about astronomy and music, but in pursuit of his declared goal of learning from Confucius, he became preoccupied and then obsessed with the *Book of changes*. Feeling he had made no progress in his understanding after six years of effort, he removed himself to a mountain retreat, where he often went for days without sleeping or eating. By his own account, for nearly thirty years, from 1570 to 1598, Lai worked out the ideas and then the manuscript of his book explaining "his" classic. It impressed his contemporaries when he presented it. In 1602, on the recommendation of governor Wang Hsiang-ch'ien (c. 1546–1630) and other officials, Lai was summoned to the capital to be

317 *MS*, 282, p. 7222. The editors of the eighteenth-century *Ssu-ke' u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao*, 1.1, made a similar point.

318 The scant biographical details on Lai Chih-te are presented in Hsü Ch'in-t'ing, *Yi ching yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1974), pp. 12–13. Also see *MS*, 283, p. 7291, and Larry Schulz, "Lai Chih-te (1525–1604) and the phenomenology of the Classic of Change" (Diss., Princeton University, 1982), pp. 48–56 and 102–26.

appointed to the Hanlin Academy.³¹⁹ Lai declined on a plea of old age, which only enhanced his reputation. He died shortly after in his eightieth year.³²⁰

Lai Chih-te claimed that understanding the *Book of changes* had been benighted for 2,000 years, since the death of Confucius.³²¹ Although he made exhaustive studies of the commentarial traditions, especially the numerical ones from Han and the doctrinal ones by Ch'eng I and Chu Hsi in Sung, Lai decided readers who relied on later commentaries were deluded. One had to understand directly through the Ten Wings of commentary which (supposedly) derived from Confucius himself.³²² To understand Confucius, the reader had to grasp the key terms and, most importantly, the symmetries inherent in the system of the sixty-four hexagrams. Lai's contribution was to discover and analyze those relationships (e.g., the several different ways an opposite is determined for each hexagram). The power of Lai's account is that the logical and numerical relationships, once he had pointed them out for the first time, are indubitably there in the linear structures of the hexagrams, without any reliance on vague, undemonstrated assertions about their coherence (*li*, or principle). Thus, Lai's exegesis of the linear relationships of the hexagrams represented a distinct alternative to Chu Hsi's reading of the text in support of the Learning of the Way. Lai's aim was not merely to explicate an ancient text. Lai would have his readers recognize that the lines and structures of the hexagrams are, like numbers, "real" things out there in the phenomenal world, existing prior to any text and external to any human mind. In this sense, he was using external evidence from the myriad things in the real of heaven-and-earth to establish his ideas.

For writers in late Ming who based their learning on other than the established commentaries or their own minds, two main types of evidence can be distinguished: data drawn from one's own perceptions of the myriad things in the realm of heaven-and-earth (*t'ien-ti wan wu*), and data drawn from earlier, not necessarily ancient, texts. These are two separable objects of study and sources of learning, but just as in sixteenth-century Europe, where humanistic scholarship and what might be called proto-scientific inquiry had significant degrees of interpenetration, Ming authors found no difficulty in juxtaposing earlier accounts with their own records of observations and experiences. The distinction here is between (a) inquiry into verbal evidence in order to

319 *Ssu-le'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao*, pp. 73–74, and A. W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period*, under Wang Hsiang-ch'ien. Wang was also instrumental in the publication of some of Yang Shen's books; see *DMB*, under Yang Shen, p. 1533.

320 Hsü Ch'in-t'ing, *I ching yen-chiu*, p. 12. In the eighteenth century, the Four Treasuries Library editors pointed out that for more than a hundred years, Lai's theories attracted many believers.

321 Lai Chih-te, *Chou i chi chu* (rpt. in *Ssu-le'u ch'üan-shu chen-pen, ssu chi*, no. 11; Taipei, n.d.), "Yüan hsü," 2b; also 3b. Lai's description of his retreat to study the *Book of changes* is on 4a.

322 Lai Chih-te, *Chou i chi chu*, 4b. Also see Hsu Ch'in-t'ing, *I ching yen-chiu*, pp. 6–11.

understand textual material and (b), establishing knowledge about the myriad things of heaven-and-earth, particularly those not made by humans, even when material drawn from others' texts was included among the sources of that knowledge.

A famous late Ming example of learning based in part on evidence derived from the phenomenal world is the *Materia Medica in systemic detail* (*pen-ts'ao kang mu*) by Li Shih-chen (1518–93).³²³ From a medical family in Hu-kuang, Li was made a certified student (*sheng-yüan*) as a teenager, but after failing in three attempts at the provincial examinations, he gave up and devoted himself to medical practice, as did his father. Li Shih-chen served as a medical man in the entourage of the Prince of Ch'u in Hu-kuang, and then at the Office of Medicine (*T'ai i yüan*) in Peking. Later, Li wrote in a preface that from 1552 to 1578 he collected and collated his material.³²⁴ He drew from forty books on *materia medica* (*pen-ts'ao*). Some were extant, but others were available only in fragments quoted in other books; they dated back to Han, but mainly were from the Sung dynasty.³²⁵ Li also culled material, including prescriptions, from about 300 other medical works and he collected instances of references to plants and other *materia medica* which appeared in the Classics and hundreds of other nonmedical texts even into the Ming period. Li did not simply paste all these quotations together; he sought to reconcile the use of terms over a period of more than 2,000 years by showing that the name for a plant or other substance had changed over time and varied between places, and also that sometimes the same name had been used for quite different substances. His massive compilation in fifty-two *chüan* arranged botanical, animal, and mineral substances under nearly 2,000 headings. There were wood-cut illustrations for many of the ingredients in a raw state, thousands of recipes and prescriptions, a long bibliography of works quoted, and various selected excerpts, comments, and lists. After three drafts and another decade for revisions, in 1590, Li Shih-chen showed a manuscript copy to Wang Shih-chen, the celebrated literary figure who was in the process of retiring from an appointment as minister of justice in Nanking.³²⁶ Wang endorsed the work by writing a preface praising Li's work, but the task of printing the book in Nanking was not finished until 1593, the year Li Shih-chen died.

Li Shih-chen's *Materia Medica in systemic detail* was an immense achievement in textual scholarship; it is precise, ambitious, sceptical, and intentionally

323 For summary accounts of Li Shih-chen, see DMB, pp. 859–65, and Joseph Needham, et al., *Science and civilisation in China*, Vol. 6.1 (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 308–21, both of which refer to some of the extensive secondary literature on Li Shih-chen in Japanese, Chinese, and Western languages.

324 Li Shih-chen, "Hsü li," *Pen-ts'ao kang mu* (punctuated edition; Peking, 1975), Vol. 1, ch. 1, p. 11.

325 See Paul A. Unschuld, *Medicine in China: a history of pharmacapeutics* (Berkeley, 1986), for a survey of the *pen-ts'ao* literature, divided into sub-genres of Unschuld's own making.

326 DMB, under Wang Shih-chen, p. 1402.

original. He used his own medical knowledge and experience of ingredients and human physiological processes to figure out and often to emend what had been asserted by previous authors, not only about nomenclature, but also about descriptions, sources, preparations, properties, and effects. Although efficacy was an important criterion for attesting one's knowledge of medicines, practicability does not seem to have been his main goal in the book, as Li himself acknowledged.³²⁷ He loosely used the correlative categories of the Five Elements (*wu hsing*), but Li stressed that he put facts first.³²⁸ In his introductory comments, Li deployed one of the key terms in Chu Hsi's teachings, "investigation of things" (*ko wu*). According to Li, in his book on *materia medica*, the process of "investigating and explication their natures (*hsing*) and coherence (*li*) is actually our Confucian learning from the investigation of things and it can rectify the misapprehensions of the *Erh ya* [a Han lexicon] and the *Book of Songs*."³²⁹ As his book makes obvious, the concept of the "investigation of things" was being applied in a new direction; Li Shih-chen was not exposing the coherence of things in general, but describing them as things (medicines) in particular. As a corollary, he was proposing that one can better explicate and even go beyond ancient texts if he has an evidenced knowledge of the myriad things. Chu Hsi's method in practice involved moving in the opposite direction, from the coherence in the Classics to our present day phenomenal world, especially the social realm. Li Shih-chen was not claiming to recover ancient learning which had been lost. He repeatedly stressed he had achieved new knowledge.

Li Shih-chen's great compendium has four aspects which anticipate the early stages of evidential learning (*k'ao-cheng hsiieh*) in the Ch'ing dynasty. (1) It superseded previous efforts. Because Li's work received the compliment of being reprinted numerous times in the seventeenth century and later, and was digested, condensed, and recast in many different versions, it nearly brought to an end the practice of reprinting the famous *materia medica* from Sung times and their Ming derivatives. (2) Although it dealt with practical learning, it was more a book for scholars than a handbook for practitioners. That latter function was quickly fulfilled by some of the derivative versions.³³⁰ (3) It was produced without imperial support for compilation or printing costs. The book was submitted posthumously by his family to the

327 See Needham, *Science and civilisation*, Vol. 6.1, p. 312.

328 See Needham, *Science and civilisation*, Vol. 6.1, p. 317.

329 Li Shih-chen, "Fan-li," *Pen-ti'ao kang mu*, p. 34. Differently trans. in Needham, *Science and civilisation*, Vol. 6.1, pp. 320–21.

330 See Unschuld, pp. 163 and 169. However, according to the eighteenth-century editors of the Four Treasuries Library collection, everyone involved with medicine had a copy of Li Shih-chen's book. *Ssu-k'u t'i yao*, p. 2132.

throne in 1596, perhaps in hope of patronage or rewards, but ostensibly in response to the call for books which would be useful for the bureau that had been recently established to compile a history of the dynasty.³³¹ Although some of the later editions were printed at the expense of provincial governments, Li Shih-chen wrote his book on his own initiative as an act of private scholarship.³³² (4) It was evidenced by critical handling of texts and contexts as well as by direct reference to some of the myriad things in the realm of heaven-and-earth.

A contemporary work also dealing with texts and aspects of the realm of heaven-and-earth, although not as large, influential, or venerated as Li Shih-chen's *Materia Medica in systemic detail*, is the *Essentials of pitchpipes' twelve semitones* (*Lü-lü chin yü*) by Chu Tsai-yü (1536–1611), which was composed between 1584 and 1596.³³³ Chu's father had the title of an imperial prince, but was imprisoned in 1550 for criticizing the conduct of the Chia-ching emperor, and Chu Tsai-yü evaded assuming the title after his father died in 1591. Whatever his motive, he spent most of his adult life studying harmonics and calendar making, particularly in conjunction with mathematics.

In *Essentials of pitchpipes' twelve semitones*, Chu Tsai-yü sought to demonstrate that he had discovered what no one before him had found: a method for calculating the ratios of the lengths of a set of twelve strings or pitchpipes such that the ratio of difference from one to the next would be equal. To achieve "equal temperament," Chu's ratio works out to be 1 divided by what in the west is known as the twelfth root of 2, i.e., $\sqrt[12]{2}$, or about 1.059463. By starting with a pitchpipe of one unit in length which gives the note called Yellow Bell (*Huang chung*), Chu knew that the pitchpipe for the Yellow Bell note in the next higher "octave" is exactly one half of that unit in length. By an arduous process of extracting square roots and cube roots, Chu calculated the ideal length of each of the strings or pitchpipes of the eleven intervening semitones.³³⁴ In his book, Chu showed how to calculate the inner and outer dimensions of thirty-six ideal pipes through three octaves. He also indicated how to make and play the pipes. Chu Tsai-yü devoted two *chüan* of his book to comparing his ideas with what he called the old methods, especially from Han, when pitchpipes became the standard tuning instrument, and from Southern Sung, when

331 DMB, p. 861. In his memorial presenting the book to the throne, Li Shih-chen's son referred at least three times to the new bureau for compiling a history. In Li Shih-chen, *Pen-ts'ao kang mu*, pp. 23–24.

332 This point is made in Unschuld, p. 145, and in Needham, Vol. 6.1, p. 311.

333 For a summary account of his biography, see DMB, pp. 367–71, under Chu Tsai-yü. The most comprehensive study is Tai Nien-tsu, *Chu Tsai-yü: Ming tai te k'o-hsüeh bo i-shu ch'ü-hsing* (Peking, 1986).

334 See Tai Nien-tsu *Chu Tsai-yü*, pp. 67–71, and Needham, *Science and civilisation*, Vol. 4.1, pp. 223–24.

Ts'ai Yüan-ting (1135–98) established his authoritative commentaries on classical passages dealing with music.³³⁵

In 1606, Chu Tsai-yü presented the emperor, his relative, with a handsomely printed and illustrated version of his *Essentials of pitchpipes' twelve semitones* along with ten other of his titles, altogether thirty-eight *chüan* of his called *Writings on the Calendar (Li shu)*, which had been first submitted in manuscript in 1595.³³⁶ In his memorial which accompanied the manuscript, Chu stressed that the sages of antiquity had detailed knowledge of calendars and music in particular as well as numbers in general. Knowledge of numbers had been one of the six arts taught by Confucius. It was only much later that knowledge of music and calendars was left to specialists and were separated, with the resulting disarray which Chu now proposed to rectify.³³⁷ His proposal was endorsed by the Ministry of Rites as needing further study, and no reforms were made.³³⁸ In his work on calendars and on pitchpipes, which he saw as intimately related, Chu Tsai-yü investigated old texts in order to help establish his new ideas. He also sought verification by reference to such perceivable phenomena as eclipses and musical sounds. However, as he acknowledged in his memorial of 1595, he did not have access to instruments necessary for accurate measurements of shadows and observation of celestial positions to determine the times of solstices and equinoxes.³³⁹ Nor could he afford to build the pitchpipes to test his calculations for his new system of tuning. His learning remained largely text-based.

The most prominent text-based sixteenth-century precursor of evidential learning was Yang Shen (1488–1559). Yang was born in Peking, where his father was serving in the Hanlin Academy on his way to becoming a grand secretary in 1507 and an influence in capital politics for two decades. Yang Shen was young when he passed as the first-ranked *chin-shih* in 1511. Appointed to the Hanlin Academy, he worked on various imperially sponsored compilations, including the *Veritable records* for the Cheng-te reign. He seemed destined for an illustrious official career, but when he and dozens of other officials challenged the new emperor over the so-called Rites Contro-

335 See the summaries of Tai Nien-tsu, *Chu Tsai-yü*, pp. 39–40, and in Fritz A. Kuttner, "Prince Chu Tsai-yü's life and work," *Ethnomusicology*, 19, No. 2 (1975), pp. 189–95. Kuttner is more reserved about Chu Tsai-yü's achievements with regard to a scale of "equal temperament" than is Kenneth Robinson, whose enthusiastic views are incorporated in Needham, Vol. 4.1, esp. pp. 220–28.

336 DMB, p. 369, and *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t' i-yao*, p. 799.

337 Chu Tsai-yü, *Sheng shou wan nien li* (1592, rpt. Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu chen-pen, ssu chi, Taipei, n.d.), *chüan shou*, 5a.

338 MS, 31, p. 527. Presumably reflecting a standard view at the time, Chu's younger contemporary, Shen Te-fu, noted that the Ming calendar was not as erroneous as Chu claimed. Shen Te-fu, *Wan-li yeh-huo pien*, 20, pp. 528–29.

339 Chu Tsai-yü, *Sheng shou wan nien li*, *chüan shou*, 9b.

versy in 1524, Yang Shen was beaten at court, along with many others, and he was banished to Yunnan. He spent the remainder of his life in exile there, and became one of the most prolific writers in the Ming period.³⁴⁰

Yang's most influential writings were based on his reading. He read everything, particularly classics, histories, early philosophers, books on statecraft, fiction, materia medica, geographic compilations such as gazetteers, books of jottings and reading notes, and philological investigations.³⁴¹ He said he spent more than forty years working on etymological and phonological questions.³⁴² In Yang's fourteen *chüan* of reading notes on the Classics, his discussion of the pivotal term *ko wu* ("investigation of things") in the "Great Learning" is an argument against Chu Hsi for adding too much in his gloss of the words; Yang cited a few related passages from classics on rituals, the *Hsün tzu*, and some post-Han texts, but his main claim on how to understand *ko wu* was put in terms of what made sense for him. He seemed to feel it was sufficient for like-minded literati merely to reflect on what he said.³⁴³ Yang's emphasis on broad learning was the opposite of the intuitive approach advocated by some followers of Wang Yang-ming for acquiring knowledge. Yang chastised those contemporary literati who did not read books, ignored scholarly refinement, and miswrote words as being no better than Ch'an monks.³⁴⁴ The reading notes Yang accumulated over the years were arranged into book manuscripts, most of which were finally edited and printed in the Wan-li reign by Chiao Hung and others. The writings most relevant to evidential learning were collected under the title *Sheng-an wai chi* in 100 *chüan* in 1616. Unlike the moral philosophers of his time, Yang focused on texts, words, and things. The categories of his topics ranged from the patterns of heaven and earth to animals and plants, manmade things and human affairs, and lexical problems.³⁴⁵ For example, still in Yunnan in 1544, Yang wrote the preface for *I yü t'u tsan* (*Illustrative Information on the Different Fish*), his four *chüan* book of quotations and notes on eighty-seven kinds of fish and thirty-five kinds of other products of the sea; he collated and corrected the information from his written sources.³⁴⁶ Although Yang was not critical in his use of sources or rigorous in his citation of evidence, and even produced books that he falsely claimed

340 DMB, pp. 1331–32, under Yang Shen, and Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, pp. 39–41.

341 Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, p. 41.

342 Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, p. 81.

343 Yang Shen, *Sheng-an ching shuo* (*T'ung-shu chi ch'eng*, Shanghai, 1936), 10, p. 155.

344 Quoted in Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, p. 49.

345 Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, p. 44, lists 27 topical categories for the *Wai chi*.

346 See *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao*, p. 2425.

had been written more than a thousand years earlier, his writings stimulated others to look for evidence to correct his errors.³⁴⁷

Critical efforts at evidential learning were little appreciated in Ming times. Mei Tsu's studies on the complex history of the Ancient Text version of the *Book of Documents* were nearly unknown, even in manuscript form, until they were printed early in the nineteenth century. Mei Tsu was a provincial graduate of 1513 from Nan Chihli who served several years at the Imperial College at Nanking, and wrote a dozen works on the Five Classics, but little else is known of his life.³⁴⁸ Mei's reopening of the issue of the authenticity of the officially recognized Ancient Text versions was a manifestation of a sceptical style of learning which sprouted, but did not flourish, in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Similarly, a four-*chüan* study by Ch'en Ti (1541–1617) on the rhymes used in the *Book of songs* was largely overlooked by his contemporaries and looked down on by early Ch'ing scholars such as Ku Yen-wu who investigated the same rhyme schemes with quite different results.³⁴⁹ Ch'en's book, printed in 1606 as *Mao shih ku yin k'ao* (*Examination of the ancient rhymes in the Mao version of the 'Book of songs'*) was written partly in response to Yang Shen's work on this problem and partly at the suggestion of Chiao Hung, who gave Ch'en access to the books in his personal collection which enabled him to review previous efforts on early rhyme schemes.³⁵⁰

Writing at the very end of the Ming dynasty, Fang I-chih (1611–71), who was later recognized for his own wide-ranging contributions to evidenced learning, offered a critique of previous efforts. "Yang Shen was very broad, but carelessly drew on vulgar or unfamiliar [sources], so actually he did not have comprehensive understanding. Chang Hsüan plagiarized too much, as from T'ao Tsung-i (1335–1402) and Wu-ch'iu Yen (fourteenth century). Chiao Hung had greater achievements than Yang Shen, but he unstintingly criticized Ch'en Yao-wen, Wang Shih-chen, and Hu Ying-lin, and from our current perspective, as he often was not able to criticize what ought to have been criticized, the criticisms were not wholly appropriate. Nevertheless, their achievements cannot be destroyed as they have passed on examples cited by earlier writers, they have raised doubts, and they provide collateral evidence."³⁵¹ Regardless of the merits of Fang I-chih's judgments, in

347 Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, p. 128.

348 DMB, p. 1059, and Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, p. 131. No further significant details are adduced in Fu Chao-k'uan, *Mei Tsu pien wei lüeh-shuo chi Shang shu k'ao yi cheng pu* (Taipei, 1988), p. 7.

349 Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, pp. 413–14, and *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao*, ch. 42, pp. 897 and 902, under *Mao shih ku yin k'ao* and *Yin lun*.

350 Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, pp. 391–93, and DMB, pp. 180–84, under Ch'en Ti.

351 Fang I-chih, *Tung ya*, "Tzu hsü." Partly cited in Lin Ch'ing-chang, *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu*, pp. 492–93.

referring to Yang Shen, Ch'en Yao-wen, Hu Ying-lin, and Chiao Hung, he named the major figures whom later historians continued to propose as possible sixteenth-century precursors of Ch'ing evidential learning.³⁵² This type of learning was not recognized by Huang Tsung-hsi for inclusion in his *Source Book of Ming Confucians*, but as tacitly recognized by Fang I-chih as well as later scholars in the eighteenth century, it was the alternative to the Learning of the Way which anticipated without directly causing the sophisticated evidential learning (*k'ao-cheng hsüeh*) which got underway in the 1630s and began to flourish from the 1680s in the Ch'ing period.

352 See *Ssu' k' u ch'üan tsung-mu t'i-yao*, p. 2501, which named Yang Shen, Ch'en Yao-wen, and Chiao Hung in a comment on evidential learning in Ming prior to Fang I-chih's own *T'ung ya* (*Comprehensive refinement*). Lin Ch'ing-chang in his *Ming tai k'ao-chü hsüeh yen-chiu* focused on eight examples, including Yang Shen, Ch'en Yao-wen, Hu Ying-lin, Chiao Hung, and, of course, Fang I-chih. The other three were Mei Tsu, Ch'en Ti, and Chou Ying, who was Fang I-chih's contemporary. Also see Ch'ien Mu, *Chung-kuo chin san-pai nien hsüeh - chu shih*, pp. 135-36, and Chi Wen fu, *Wan Ming ssu-hsiang shih lun*, p. 98, for more or less the same listings. Notably, Chi added the name of Wang Shih-chen.

CHAPTER 12

LEARNING FROM HEAVEN: THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER WESTERN IDEAS INTO LATE MING CHINA

Of the alternatives represented in the intellectual scene in late Ming, the westerners' Learning from Heaven (*T'ien hsiieh*) was the least well precedented.¹ In spite of efforts to assimilate some of it to vocabulary and concepts in classical texts, the Learning from Heaven could not escape also being labeled as western Learning (*Hsi hsiieh*). It was foreign, whereas the other main intellectual alternatives to the Learning of the Way (*Tao hsiieh*), including Buddhism, were only different (*i*). Although critics of the missionaries cited foreign origins in attempts to discredit the Learning from Heaven, its foreignness remained less an issue in late Ming than it became in the K'ang-hsi period in early Ch'ing. With no obvious detriment to his contemporary reputation, Ricci was well known under the name Li of the Far West (Li Hsi-t'ai). He and his confreres published books about that different part of the world, the Far West, from which they had come. Ricci reported being told in 1599 by a censor in Nanking that, having lived in Kiangsi and other places, he was "no longer a foreigner in China. Can there be any objection to his residing in Nanking, where there are so many Hui-hui [Muslims]?"² Ricci had been proceeding since 1595 with the tactic of acting "as though we were men of China" (*come uomini già della Cina*).³ Especially in the early phase of the mission, there was a self-conscious effort by a few of the missionaries to be Chinese, but an important aspect of their impact on literati with whom they had contact was that they were from a distant, unknown place.⁴

At the same time, they presented the essentials of their learning as universal. One of Ricci's converts wrote in 1608 that the missionary not only was not different (*i*) or strange, but also that his conduct and his learning were compa-

1 Christians and forms of Christianity had been present during the T'ang dynasty and again under the Mongols. For a summary, see George Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci, S. J.: A case study of an effort at guided cultural change in China in the sixteenth century," *Monumenta Serica*, 25 (1966), pp. 120–22.

2 Matteo Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, ed. Pasquale d'Elia, S. J., Vol. 2, p. 47, n. 536, as trans. in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 69.

3 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 378, n. 491. Cf. Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 32 and 70.

4 See the insightful discussion on the ambiguities in "The problem of nationality" in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 49–70.

tible with Heaven.⁵ The word “heaven” which the westerners used to distinguish the learning they sought to disseminate in China was nicely ambiguous in its referents, pointing both to the religious Lord of Heaven (*T'ien chu*), or the Christian God, and to secular knowledge of patterns of heaven (*t'ien wen*), or astronomy in particular and science in general. The understanding of some of the converts moved from calculations involving celestial phenomena, through the realization that “the same minds and the same principles [are] in the Eastern and Western seas,”⁶ to recognition of an eternal, universal Lord of Heaven who was behind the religious truths as well as the regular “laws of Nature.”

Although the so-called laws of Nature were represented by the missionaries as being universally so, from our late twentieth-century point of view the learning about patterns of heaven that they circulated in China in late Ming was culture-bound and partial. Fewer than a dozen missionaries were involved in the publication of some fifty titles on topics in mathematics, astronomy, geography, and what was known then as natural philosophy.⁷ Almost without exception, the writings were expressions of the Aristotelian scholasticism which still prevailed in European universities' curricula. Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Galen were repeatedly cited as authorities at the moment that the vanguard of scientific knowledge in Europe was abandoning them for new assumptions, methods, and authorities. Copernicus and Galileo were mentioned, but the heliostatic or heliocentric hypothesis was not conveyed in other than Tycho Brahe's compromise system which still centered on the Earth.⁸ Without judging the merits or the motives of the Jesuit missionaries' teaching Aristotelian scholasticism rather than the new science associated with men such as Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Vesalius, and William Harvey, we might bear in mind that the Learning from Heaven offered to Chinese readers in late Ming was only one of the sets of competing ideas explaining the phenomenal world.

A similar point applies to the religious ideas presented as part of the Learning from Heaven. The missionaries were Roman Catholic, not Protestant. In late Ming, they had to embark from Lisbon to reach China by way of

5 Li Chih-tsao, Preface to Ricci's *Chi-jen shih p'ien*, in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u ban*, ed. Li Chih-tsao (1628; rpt. Taipei, 1965), 2a, p. 103. Cf. Willard J. Peterson, “Why did they become christians?” *East meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582–1773*, eds. Charles E. Ronan, S. J. and Bonnie B. C. Oh (Chicago, 1988), p. 138, and Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York, 1984), p. 127.

6 Li Chih-tsao, quoted in Peterson, “Why did they become christians?” p. 142.

7 For further bibliographical and biographical details, see Willard J. Peterson, “Western natural philosophy published in late Ming China,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 117, No. 4 (1973), pp. 295–96.

8 See the summary in Peterson, “Western natural philosophy,” pp. 298–300. Also see Nathan Sivin, “Copernicus in China,” *Colloquia Copernica*, II, *Études sur l'audience de la théorie héliocentrique* (Warsaw, 1973), esp. pp. 76–82.

Goa and Macao and thus were subject to the control of the Portuguese and then, from 1580, to the authority of the Spanish kings. Nearly all of the missionaries who participated in the late Ming intellectual milieu through their writings and conversations with literati were Jesuits. All of that is well known and not problematic, but the effect was that the religious ideas presented to their Chinese readers were not ascribed to universally in Western Europe or on the Spanish peninsula or in the order of the Society of Jesus, even among its representatives who labored in China.⁹ A germane example is the controversies centering on the theological ideas of Luis de Molina (1535–1600), a Jesuit at the university in Evora, Portugal. Writing in the decades after the Council of Trent came to its inconclusive end in 1564, Molina sought to reconcile the Thomist doctrine on the necessity of divine grace that was defended especially by Dominicans and the Spanish king, with the stress placed in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola on the capacity, and even the need, for each person to commit himself to being saved.¹⁰ Even before Molina's book, *Concordia*, was published in Lisbon in 1588, debate on this issue was intense. It continued through the 1580s and 1590s and was only halted in 1607 with a papal decree which called for a truce on both sides until a decision, never forthcoming, was made in Rome.¹¹ Leading Jesuit thinkers, such as the influential Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), who had been one of Matteo Ricci's teachers at the Jesuits' Collegio Romano, did not wholly accept Molina, but he gained popularity among Jesuits concerned with pastoral practice and foreign missions.¹² By the end of the seventeenth century, Jesuits were being "accused of favoring lax standards of spirituality at home, with indiscriminate access to the sacraments, ready absolution, and too frequent communion; and of being ready to compromise true Catholic teaching abroad."¹³ At the beginning of the Jesuits' activities in China, however, the same practices were being glossed positively as accommodation to local cultural practice and encouragement of the early stages of true belief based more on effort than grace.¹⁴

Another controversial area with important implications for the accessibility of the Jesuits' religion to potential converts in China was argued out narrowly in terms of the perennial struggles between adherents of teachings

9 See A. D. Wright, *The Counter-Reformation: Catholic Europe and the non-Christian world* (London, 1982), pp. 30–31, 138.

10 T. M. Parker, "The papacy, Catholic reform, and Christian missions," in *The Counter-Reformation and price revolution, 1559–1610*, Vol. 8 of *The New Cambridge Modern History*, ed. R. B. Wernham (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 68–69.

11 Parker, "The papacy," pp. 68–69.

12 Parker, "The papacy," pp. 68–69. Joseph Sebes, "The precursors of Ricci," in Ronan and Oh, *East Meets West*, pp. 36–37.

13 Wright, *The Counter-Reformation*, p. 35.

14 See Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 155.

traced back to either Aristotle or Plato and more broadly in terms of the acceptability of pagan authors.¹⁵ In 1593, one of the prolific scholars and translators of the day, Francesco Patrizi (1529–97), published his *New Philosophy of the Universe* (*Nova de Universis Philosophia*) with a dedication to Pope Gregory XIV urging him to order the Platonism associated with the tradition of Hermes Trismegistus to displace the dangerous teachings of Aristotelian scholasticism in Christian schools, particularly those operated by Jesuits.¹⁶ Patrizi was invited from Ferrara to teach Platonism in Rome, but his book was eventually condemned. Nevertheless, about the time the Jesuits were entering China there were strong, sometimes well-received arguments for a more open stance towards pagan religious expression, and these sentiments continued to be expounded and criticized through the seventeenth century. The proponents of what was called the Ancient Theology finally lost the battle within the Roman Catholic Church, but in the meanwhile their arguments provided justification for any Jesuits who would choose to presume “writings ascribed to Confucius, and other ancient Chinese classics, were compatible with Christian ethics and monotheism, with good, ‘natural’ religion.”¹⁷ Perhaps the extreme expression of this attitude came in the *Nouveaux Mémoires sur l’état présent de la Chine*, which a China missionary, Louis LeComte, published in Paris in 1696. He offered the propositions that “the Chinese during two thousand years up to the time of Christ had known the true God, had honoured Him in a way that can serve as an example to Christians, had sacrificed to Him in the most ancient temple in the world, had had faith and all the Christian virtues, and of all the nations had been the most favored by God’s graces.”¹⁸

LeComte and others were willing to implicate Matteo Ricci posthumously as their ally in the claim that the Ancient Theology had been present in earliest China.¹⁹ There is no good evidence that the early Jesuit missionaries wholly participated in these radical inferences, but there is at least circumstantial evidence that the ferment of such ideas at the end of the

15 D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian platonism from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century* (London, 1972), pp. 128–30.

16 Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, pp. 111–12, and Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the hermetic tradition* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 181–83. For a summary of the *Nova Philosophia*, see Paul O. Kristeller, *Eight philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, 1964), pp. 118–25.

17 Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, p. 197.

18 Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, p. 199, drawn from Virgile Pinot, *La Chine et la formation de l’esprit philosophique en France (1640–1740)* (Paris, 1932), p. 98. Also see the similar ideas in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, ed. Philippe Couplet, published in Paris in 1687, as cited in Paul A. Rule, *K’ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit interpretation of Confucianism* (Sydney, 1986), p. 118. See also the reservations expressed in George H. Dunne, *Generation of giants: The story of the Jesuits in China in the last decades of the Ming dynasty* (London, 1962), pp. 26–27.

19 Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, pp. 200–01.

sixteenth century opened the possibility of taking an accommodative stance toward ideas which they began to call Confucianism and making expedient use of more prudent presentations of Christian theology.

PUTTING ON NEW CLOTHES

In 1557, Portuguese merchants were granted the privilege of maintaining permanent residence at what came to be called Macao. It became a small settlement on a peninsula in Hsiang-shan district, south of Canton, which they officially were allowed to visit twice a year for trade. Portuguese ships had reached the China coast by 1513 and a trade mission visited Peking in 1520.²⁰ Missionaries traveled with the merchants and, like them, were restricted in their opportunities by the Chinese authorities, although both groups hoped to pursue their goals in China. After two or three years of mission work in Japan, the Jesuit, Francis Xavier (1506–52), determined that converting China was the key to converting Japan. He proposed to travel with another Portuguese embassy to Peking as a papal envoy and there persuade the emperor to allow Christians to live, travel, and preach in the empire. Portuguese rivalries thwarted the plan in Malacca, and Xavier attempted to proceed on his own. He was taken as far as a small island southwest of what was to become Macao and, his plans aborted, died there in the winter of 1552.²¹

Over the next thirty years, more than fifty priests and lay brothers – mostly Jesuits and Franciscans, but also a few Augustinians and Dominicans – vainly attempted to establish residence in Ming territory for purposes other than trade.²² After decades of frustration, a major change was initiated by Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), who was appointed the Visitor for all Jesuit activities east of Africa. On his way from Goa to Japan he stopped in Macao in 1577–78. Against the predilections of Jesuits who ministered to the Macao community, Valignano decided missionaries for China should learn Chinese customs and the spoken and written language. In response to his order, Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) was sent from Goa.²³

Ruggieri arrived in Macao in the summer of 1579 and began an intensive course in Chinese. He progressed enough with his tutors to try putting the “Great Learning” into Latin,²⁴ and in 1580 he began to go with the merchants

20 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 149.

21 Sebes, “The precursors of Ricci,” pp. 23–27.

22 Sebes, “The precursors of Ricci,” pp. 27–30.

23 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 147; Harris, “The mission of Matteo Ricci,” pp. 36–37; Sebes, “The precursors of Ricci,” pp. 32–33; Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 17.

24 Knud Lundback, “The first translation from a Confucian classic in Europe,” *China Mission Studies Bulletin*, 1 (1979), pp. 1–11.

on their regular trips to Canton.²⁵ At this time Ruggieri reported that his study of Chinese was being criticized in Macao, even by fellow Jesuits. According to him, some asked, "What is the sense of this Father occupying himself with this sort of thing when he could be of service in the other ministries of the Society? It is a waste of time for him to learn the Chinese language and to consecrate himself to a hopeless enterprise."²⁶

Valignano protected him, and in 1582, ordered that instead of trying to make converts more like Portuguese, the strategy was to recognize Chinese Christians as Chinese. In response to a suggestion by Ruggieri, Valignano also had the Goa authorities dispatch two more Jesuits to study Chinese in Macao. They arrived in the summer of 1582.²⁷

Just prior to this, Ruggieri went with the mayor of Macao to Chao-ch'ing, the seat of the provincial governor of Kuang-tung, to be told of the violation of Ming rules by a Spanish group led by a Jesuit from the Philippines. They had landed in southern Fukien and were brought to Canton as spies. Supposedly Ruggieri made a favorable impression on the governor, who sent for him after his return to Macao with the "spies."²⁸ Ruggieri accepted the invitation and took one of the newly arrived Jesuits, Francesco Pasio (1554–1612), with him to take up residence in a Buddhist temple.

Instead of the European garb and full beard in which he had presented himself to the governor earlier in the year, Ruggieri wore Buddhist robes and had shaven his head and face. According to Ruggieri, the governor "wanted us to dress in the fashion of their priests which is little different from ours; now we have done so and, in brief, have become Chinese in order to win China for Christ."²⁹

A few years earlier, at Valignano's direction, the Jesuit missionaries in Japan had adopted Zen Buddhist robes, and Ruggieri and Pasio were adopting them as part of the strategy to gain permission to reside in Chao-ch'ing.³⁰ However, they were ordered back to Macao almost immediately. Pasio then went on to Japan. When the invitation was renewed, perhaps by the prefect at Chao-ch'ing, Ruggieri went back in the summer of 1583. Still with Bud-

25 Sebes, "The precursors of Ricci," pp. 29, 34.

26 Letter by Ruggieri in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.J.*, ed. Pietro Tacchi Venturi (Macerata, 1911–13), Vol. 2, p. 397, as trans. in Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 19. Also see Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 55.

27 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 19; Sebes, "The precursors of Ricci," p. 34; Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 7.

28 Sebes, "The precursors of Ricci," pp. 29–30; Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 19–20.

29 As trans. in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 83, from Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 416. The final phrase is "*siamo fatti Cini ut Christo Sinas lucrificiamus.*"

30 Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 82 and 84. See Sebes, "The precursors of Ricci," p. 58, note 72, for testimony by a Jesuit newly arrived in Japan that he was starting life anew.

dhist robes and a shaven head, this time he was accompanied by the other recently arrived Jesuit, Matteo Ricci.³¹

In a nice coincidence, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) was born in Italy a few months before Francis Xavier died off the south coast of China.³² After studying law in Rome for three years, he joined the Society of Jesus in 1571 as a novice and met Alessandro Valignano. Valignano, who left in 1574 for Goa and East Asia, helped draw Ricci to China.³³ In his studies under the Jesuits in Rome, he was exposed to Christopher Clavius (1537–1612), a leading academic mathematician who was instrumental in the formulation of the Gregorian calendar announced in 1582, and to Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), the celebrated Jesuit theologian who arrived to teach in Rome in 1576 and whose views eventually won papal support.³⁴ To prepare for his mission in the East, Ricci went, in 1577, to the university at Coimbra in Portugal, where what were to become the authoritative versions of Aristotelian natural philosophy were being developed for eventual publication in the 1590s.³⁵ Thus, Ricci, in his early twenties, was exposed to the rapidly evolving idea of a Jesuit mission in Asia under Portuguese control, to the most up to date established concepts in mathematics and astronomy, to the new ideas in technical theology that were intended to win arguments with Protestants and, conceivably, pagans, and to the latest exposition of an elaborate, systematic account of natural phenomena which was to be the standard in most Catholic universities in the first half of the seventeenth century. It was a heady experience.

Matteo Ricci sailed from Lisbon in 1578 for Goa with twelve other Jesuits, among them Michele Ruggieri. There, Ricci completed his theological studies, and was ordained a priest in 1580.³⁶ He then was sent to Macao, where he began to learn Chinese immediately after his arrival in the summer of 1582.³⁷ A year later, Ricci went back with Ruggieri to Chao-ch'ing. Ruggieri

31 Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 55–56; Sebes, "The precursors of Ricci," pp. 35–36.

32 For brief biographical summaries, see the entry by Wolfgang Franke on Matteo Ricci in *DMB*, Vol. 2, pp. 1137–44, and Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," esp. pp. 6–18. The central, indispensable source on Ricci in China is his own account, available in *Fonti Ricciane: documenti originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni tra l'Europa e la Cina 1579–1615*, ed. Pasquale d'Elia, S.J., 3 vols. (Rome, 1942–49). The fullest accounts of his life in English are in Vincent Cronin, *The wise man from the West* (London, 1955), and in Dunne's *Generation of giants*. A richly detailed reconstruction of aspects of Ricci's experience is in Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*. All of these items include further bibliography relevant to Ricci.

33 Sebes, "The precursors of Ricci," p. 32.

34 Sebes, "The precursors of Ricci," p. 36; Wright, *The Counter-Reformation*, p. 91; Parker, "The Papacy," p. 67. Even from China, Ricci remained in touch with Clavius.

35 See Peterson, "Western natural philosophy," p. 297. Sister Patricia Reif, "Textbooks in natural philosophy, 1600–1650," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 30 (1969), p. 23.

36 See Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 7 and 151.

37 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 154, n. 207. Ricci is specific that he was learning what he called *mandarina*. See Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 38–39.

had been granted permission to reside there, presumably with the support of the district magistrate, Wang P'an, a *chin-shih* from Shao-hsing, Chekiang. They had a residence and chapel built, continued to learn to speak Mandarin (*kuan-hua*), and to read. With their teachers' help, they put the Ten Commandments, prayers, and a catechism into Chinese. Ricci worked out a map of the world with the place names represented in Chinese characters. Ruggieri traveled north to Shao-hsing and also west into Kwangsi and up into Hunan; he was looking for contacts rather than converts so as to expand the mission beyond Chao-ch'ing.³⁸ In 1588, Ruggieri was ordered by Valignano to return to Rome to persuade the authorities to commission a papal embassy to the Ming emperor. This had been Xavier's hope as the most effective means to secure permission to proselytize in China, and Valignano wanted to try it again. Ricci remained in the Chao-ch'ing residence with another Jesuit, Antonio de Almeida, who also began to study the Chinese language.³⁹

Already in 1585 Ricci claimed, "I can now converse with everyone without an interpreter and can write and read fairly well."⁴⁰ In a letter in 1592 he recalled more modestly, "I diligently gave myself to the study of the language and in a year or two I could get along without an interpreter. I also studied the writing. This is more difficult, however, and although I have worked hard at it up to the present time, I am still unable to understand all books."⁴¹ The previous year, Ricci had been told by Valignano to translate the Four Books into Latin, which immersed him in the key classical texts. In 1594, he started again with a tutor, after being without one for at least seven years. "Every day I have two lessons with my teacher and devote some time to composition. Taking courage to write by myself, I have begun a book presenting our faith according to natural reason. It is to be distributed throughout China when printed."⁴²

Ricci was acquiring the skills which would enable him to reach his target audience, the literati, by using their language and "natural reason."

In the meantime, Ricci and Almeida had been expelled from Chao-ch'ing in 1589, but were allowed to take up residence in Shao-chou, several hundred *li* to the north in Kwangtung. They still wore Buddhist-style robes and shaved heads. Local men seem to have regarded their chapel and residence as a Buddhist temple (*ssu*). They would arrange to have their own gatherings there, including banquets, as had been the practice at Chao-ch'ing. They

38 Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 8–10 and pp. 40–41.

39 Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 10.

40 As trans. in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 41, from a letter Ricci sent to the General of the Society of Jesus, in Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 60.

41 As trans. in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 43, from Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 91.

42 As trans. in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 44, from Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 122.

were also attracted by the books, pictures, maps, and curious mechanical instruments, including clocks and astrolabes.⁴³ Ricci realized at Chao-ch'ing that officials could come because it was not a private residence; it had a quasi-public status. When important people were gathered there, "the street was filled with their palanquins and the river bank in front of our door was filled with the large, handsome boats of the mandarins."⁴⁴

One of the literati who called on them was Ch'ü Ju-k'uei, a certified student (*sheng-yüan*) from Soochow.⁴⁵ Ch'ü went to Ricci for information about silver and quicksilver (mercury), but it is not clear if his purpose was alchemical or metallurgical. (New processes involving mercury or quicksilver for increasing the yield of silver extracted from ore had been developed in the sixteenth century and were being used with great effect in Peru and Mexico.)⁴⁶ Regardless of Ch'ü's intent, Ricci thought such requests concerned making real silver (*vero argento*) from quicksilver (*argento vivo*), and the missionaries could not help.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Ch'ü continued to associate with Ricci over a two-year period. Apparently he was the one who suggested Ricci and Almeida ought not to be (Buddhist) monks (*seng*), but should let their hair grow and be called Confucians (*ju*).⁴⁸

For such a change, Ricci had to receive permission from Valignano, who arrived in Macao from Japan in the autumn of 1592. Another year or more passed before Lazzaro Cattaneo, a newly arrived Jesuit, pressed the question with Valignano. According to Ricci, Cattaneo urged that in China the missionaries should let their hair and beards grow long and should wear silk robes and ceremonial hats. The request was granted by Valignano.⁴⁹ Cattaneo then went to Shao-chou to help Ricci in 1594. (Almeida had died of fever in Macao in 1591, as did his replacement.) They stopped shaving their heads and faces, but still wore Buddhist robes.

The next spring Ricci traveled north into Kiangsi. At Chi-shui, in Chi-an prefecture, he called on an official who had served in Shao-chou. For the first time in public, he wore his new clothes.⁵⁰ He described his robe in a letter

43 Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 86–87.

44 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 259, n. 312; slightly altered from the translation in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 86.

45 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 295, n. 1.

46 See the summary in Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, pp. 185–88. Also Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 44 and 124.

47 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 240, n. 295.

48 According to Li Chih-tsao in his discussion of the Nestorian inscription from T'ang times. Li, "Tu Ching-chiao pei-shu hou," 13a, in Li chih-tsao, *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u ban*, Vol. 1, p. 85. Presumably Li was told this by Ricci. Cf. Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 87, and Paul Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius?*, p. 18.

49 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, pp. 335–37, n. 429. Partly trans. in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 89.

50 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, pp. 346–47, n. 7.

written later in 1595: "The formal robe, worn by literati (*letterate*) and notables, is of dark purple silk with long, wide sleeves; the hem, which touches my feet, has a border of bright blue silk half a palm in width and the sleeves and collar, which drops to the waist, are trimmed in the same way . . . The Chinese wear this costume on the occasion of visits to persons with whom they are not well-acquainted, formal banquets, and when calling on officials. Since persons receiving visitors dress, in accordance with their rank, in the same way, my prestige is greatly enhanced when I go visiting."⁵¹

By the end of the year, when he had established a residence at Nan-ch'ang, Ricci was also being carried in a chair and accompanied by a retinue of servants.⁵² Ricci was quite explicit that he would not present himself as an official representative of a foreign power, whether the Spanish king or the pope, but as a peer to learned Chinese with cultivated relations to officials. Recalling this juncture, Ricci wrote, "Thus, it was better now to proceed confidently as though we were in fact men of China."⁵³ He had started writing a book the previous year, and now, from 1595, Ricci was embarked on his new role as a literatus or even Confucian from the West (*hsijiu*). Although not a literatus (*shih*) in the sense of one who is skilled enough in the written language to produce passable examination-type essays, Ricci was acceptable as a peer of literati roughly to the degree that some Buddhist clergy or figures such as Wang Ken were.

Ricci as a literatus

Wearing his new clothes, Ricci traveled down the Kan River to Nan-ch'ang, and then down the Yangtze to Nanking, which he reached at the end of May, 1595. He called on various contacts he had made in Chao-ch'ing and Shao-chou, but within a couple of weeks he was forced to leave, although he vowed he would rather be imprisoned than leave the Southern capital.⁵⁴ Ricci retreated to Nan-ch'ang, where, after some initial tribulations, he was able to reside for three years. He cultivated provincial officials and imperial princes, but mostly he engaged in extensive social and intellectual exchanges with the local literati.⁵⁵ As a direct outcome of these involvements, in 1595 Ricci wrote an essay in Chinese entitled "*Yu lun*" ("On Friendship"), or as

51 Slightly altered from trans. in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 90, from Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, pp. 199–200. See the Rubens drawing which appears as the frontispiece and opposite p. 177 in Dunne, *Generation of giants*.

52 Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 90–91.

53 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 378, n. 491. Altered from trans. in Harris, p. 70.

54 See the trans. in Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 39, from Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 201.

55 See Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 41.

he referred to it, *Amicitia* or *Amicizia*.⁵⁶ It circulated in manuscript and then in printed versions, although Ricci himself complained he could not publish it as he could not secure the requisite permission from his superiors in the Society of Jesus.⁵⁷ Similarly, in response to the admiration expressed for his powers of memorization, which he was pleased to demonstrate at gatherings of literati, he completed another small treatise in 1596 in Chinese, “*Chi fa*” (“The Art of Memory”) or as he referred to it, “*Trattato della memoria locale*” (A Treatise on Compartmentalized Memory).⁵⁸ He was able to buy a house in Nan-ch’ang, but instead of having a chapel, as at Chao-ch’ing and Shao-chou, Ricci had a room or hall for discussions, or what the literati would call discourses on learning (*chiang hsiieh*).⁵⁹ In addition to going out to visit, Ricci reported he was inundated by visitors in the autumn of 1597, when thousands of literati assembled in Nan-ch’ang for the Kiangsi provincial examination.⁶⁰ Thus, two years after he put on robes to present himself as a literatus rather than as a cleric, Ricci was demonstrating in his conversations and writings, and in his conduct and environment, that he was one. The book he was drafting in these years, which was first printed in 1603 as the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*T’ien-chu shih-i*), was structured as a dialogue between a Chinese literatus (*chung shih*) and a literatus from the West (*hsi shih*), referring to Ricci himself.

Ricci was persuaded that it was not practicable to try to reach Peking as part of an embassy from a king or pope, but he still had Peking as his goal. He had raised the possibility that one of the princes at Nan-ch’ang might make arrangements for him,⁶¹ but a real opportunity presented itself when Cattaneo arrived from Shao-chou with the news that Wang Hung-hui (1542–1601?) was coming to see him in a few days. Wang, a 1565 *chin-shih* from Kwangtung, had passed through Shao-chou a few years earlier on his way home after retiring as Minister of the Nanking Ministry of Rites. In his conversations with Ricci, Wang raised the idea that Ricci might be able to contribute to the current discussions on the reform of the Ming calendar, which was under the supervision of the Ministry of Rites.⁶² Now, in 1598, as Wang was traveling

56 A Wan-li print of the treatise bears the title *Yu lun*; it later went under the title *Chiao yu lun*.

57 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 44, quoting from Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 248.

58 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, pp. 359–60, 362–63, and 376–77, nn. 469, 475, and 490; Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 40; Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, esp. pp. 155–42.

59 Two letters written by Ricci in the autumn of 1596, quoted in Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 46, from Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, pp. 215 and 230. Also see Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 46, n. 536.

60 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 47, referring to Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 242.

61 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 6–7, n. 503.

62 The discussions were precipitated by a long memorial in 1596 proposing calendar reform. See Willard Peterson, “Calendar reform prior to the arrival of missionaries at the Ming court,” *Ming Studies*, 21 (1986), pp. 49–55.

north in hopes of again receiving an appointment to office, he stopped at Shao-chou to offer to take Ricci with him. Thus, in June, Ricci and Cattaneo, accompanied by two Chinese Brothers (*fratelli*), Chung Ming-jen and Yu Wen-hui, embarked from Nan-ch'ang in the entourage of Wang Hung-hui. Wang was going to Nanking and then on to Peking to take part in the birthday congratulations for the emperor in the eighth lunar month.⁶³

Ricci's first trip to Peking did not go well. Wang went north from Nanking separately from Ricci's group. Once in the capital Ricci found no way to present the gifts he had brought for the emperor, and his contacts all seemed wary of him. Ricci retreated south, first to Soochow, where Ch'ü Ju-k'uei cared for him while he was ill, and then, in the spring of 1599, to Nanking. With Wang Hung-hui's encouragement, he managed to buy a house there and pursued the activities that had made him an attractive figure in Nan-ch'ang: interviews with the curious and influential, displays of his clocks, prisms, musical instruments, maps, pictures, and other exotic items, and discussions of his ideas. In the spring of 1600, he set out again for Peking, accompanied by Chung Ming-jen, Yu Wen-hui (who was skilled in Western-style painting), and the Jesuit, Diego Pantoja (who knew how to tune, play, and teach the clavichord which was being presented among the gifts intended for the emperor).⁶⁴ After various difficulties, attendant especially on the ambiguities over whether his was an embassy bearing tribute to the court, and, if not, how he and the gifts were to be handled, Ricci, by the beginning of 1601, was ensconced at the capital for the remainder of his life.

As a literatus in Peking, Ricci was an enormous success. There was a constant flow of visitors to the Jesuits' residence, many of which Ricci had to repay. As Ricci acknowledged, he was a beneficiary of the large numbers of literati and officials who came to Peking each year for examinations or government matters. "Among the thousands who thus flock here from all fifteen provinces, there are many who either already know the Fathers in Peking or in other residences, or who have heard of us and our teachings, or have seen the books which we have published or which speak of us. As a consequence, we have to spend the entire day in the reception hall to receive visitors . . . To all of them we speak of the things pertaining to our holy faith."⁶⁵

63 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 8–10, nn. 504–06; also Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 50.

64 Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," p. 14; Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 53–60 and 69–71. For a discussion of the gifts, see Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, esp. pp. 194–95, and the lists in Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 123–24.

65 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 353–54, n. 769, altered from translation in Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 92.

Most callers were merely curious, but with some Ricci also was able to maintain serious intellectual relationships which lasted for years, and a few of those cases included their conversion to his “holly faith.”

To be a literatus was not simply a matter of changing clothes. Ricci had committed himself to a mode of living which may or may not have been detrimental to the Christianizing mission which was the purpose of his being in China. The tactic of being more Chinese, initiated by Valignano, had no necessary stopping point. Learning to speak Chinese led to reading, which led to writing. Writing Chinese entailed using Chinese vocabulary to express nonChinese concepts, and losing important distinctions in the translation. The boundary shifted. For example, after Ricci’s death, the written version of the Latin formula used at baptism began to be translated rather than just transliterated.⁶⁶ For his part, Ricci was confident he was drawing his hosts’ ideas closer to his own. “I make every effort to turn our way the leader of the literati sect, that is Confucius, by interpreting any ambiguities in his writing in our favor.”⁶⁷ However, describing the Chinese literati’s rather than reflecting on his own experience, Ricci observed, “This doctrine [of the literati] is not acquired by choice, but is imbibed with the study of the literature, and neither degree holder nor official leaves off professing it.”⁶⁸ To some extent, then, by learning to read and write in Chinese, Ricci and the other missionaries were indoctrinating themselves as they prepared to disseminate the Learning from Heaven (*t’ien hsüeh*) they had brought with them. This tension between what was Western and what was Chinese, between the imported and the indigenous, and how much compromise was permissible, were at the core of the debates among missionaries as well as among Catholics back in Europe over the policy of accommodation, over decisions of whether and how to translate key terms, and over the status of rituals which might continue to be performed by converts or adapted by missionaries.⁶⁹ From the way he conducted himself after 1595, it seems clear that Ricci had decided acting as a literatus did not jeopardize his Christian mission even as it diminished his foreignness.

66 See Harris, *Generation of giants*, p. 146, and Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 370.

67 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 296, n. 709. Also trans. in Rule, *K’ung-tzu or Confucius?*, p. 1.

68 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 115, n. 176. Partly trans. in Harris, *Generation of giants*, pp. 112–13. *Questa legge pigliano loro non per elezione, ma con lo studio delle lettere la bevono, e nessuno graduato nè magistrato lascia di professarla.*

69 See Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 227–30. The debates are considered in Rule, *K’ung-tzu or Confucius?*, esp. pp. 43–50 and 70–149.

The Learning from Heaven presented in Ricci's books

From Ricci's perspective, he was talking and writing about and for "our holy faith." He used ancillary parts of his cultural baggage the way he used curious nonreligious objects, such as clocks and prisms, and curiosity about himself to attract and hold men long enough for God to "soften their hearts."⁷⁰ Ricci knew he was leading them to the Gospel, but it was not his starting point, either in his discussions or in his writings. The bulk of his literati audience probably never had access to the central doctrines of his holy faith. Leaving aside the relatively few who were baptized, most literati whose acquaintance with Ricci and his writings passed beyond satisfaction of their curiosity were confronted with a range of ideas which went by the broad but distinguishing label of the Learning from Heaven (*T'ien hsiieh*). While he was alive, and even after he died in 1610, Ricci and his writings were treated as a novel part of the literati intellectual milieu.

Much of Ricci's vocabulary and some of his ideas were shared by all literati, but part of the attraction was that some of the vocabulary and many of his ideas were new, or strange, or odd, or finally, foreign. There was a continuum. For example, Ricci introduced his collection of a hundred items on friendship with a perfectly apt allusion to *Analects* 16.8: he had traveled by sea from far to the west in order to show his respect for the cultural power (*wen te*) of the Son of Heaven of the great Ming.⁷¹ Ricci demonstrated expectable willingness to be patronized when he explained the impetus for his compilation came at a banquet in Nan-ch'ang where a prince took his hand and asked to hear of the way of friendship in his western country.⁷² Once the manuscript was circulating, his readers could not have been surprised by such observations as that one should be circumspect in making friends and steadfast in keeping them, or that merchants in pursuit of profits could not truly be friends. The idea and ideal of friendship, or fellowship (*yü*), had been discussed among literati, especially those involved in discourses learning, for several decades, so Ricci's contribution could be assimilated to that debate. His readers would notice that some of Ricci's examples named some hitherto unknown countries and persons as explicitly Western. (This was inevitable as Ricci drew the mostly aphoristic comments of ancient authors from an anthology on friends compiled by André de Resende, 1498–1573.)⁷³ Most

70 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 91, quoting from Venturi, *Opere storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 376, *ammollira i loro cuori*.

71 Ricci, "Chiao yü lun," 1a, in Li, *T'ien-hsiieh ch'ü han*, p. 299. The passage is also trans. in Fang Hao, "Notes on Matteo Ricci's *De Amicitia*," *Monumenta Serica*, 14 (1949–55), p. 574.

72 Ricci, "Chiao yü lun," 1b, p. 300.

73 Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, pp. 142 and 150. Spence infers that Ricci dredged the examples from what he remembered of de Resende's book. Cf. Pasquale M. D'Elia, "Further notes on Matteo Ricci's *De Amicitia*," *Monumenta Serica*, 15 (1956), p. 366.

literati would have paused at reading that friends come in pairs just as “The divinity on high (*shang ti*) gave humans two eyes, ears, hands and feet . . . ”⁷⁴ They would not previously have seen the classical term *shang ti* in such a sentence, and Ricci’s book on friendship did not explain how he meant it. Similarly, his treatise on the art of memory, which describes techniques for mnemonic associations and for placing and finding images, particularly Chinese written words,⁷⁵ includes many unknown Western names in passing, and it begins with the proposition, “The spiritual soul bestowed on humans by the lord, maker of things (*tsao wu chu*), is the most intellective compared to the other ten thousand things.”⁷⁶ Thus, in his writings that he began to circulate in the mid-1590s and which have a strong humanistic rather than religious orientation, Ricci interjected new names as well as a new, central concept he hoped to disseminate in China: the Christian idea of a supreme deity.

Ricci provided a more extensive, but not exhaustive, explanation of his idea in his book entitled *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*T’ien-chu shih yi*). He had begun working on this at least by 1595, when he was in Nan-ch’ang as a literatus, and it was first printed in 1603 in Peking.⁷⁷ Presented as dialogues between Chinese literati (*chung shih*) and a literatus from the West (*hsi shih*), it was based in part on actual conversations Ricci had.⁷⁸ Using the terms Lord of Heaven, Divinity on High (*Shangti*), and Divinity of Heaven (*T’ienti*) interchangeably,⁷⁹ Ricci argued for his God’s existence and that he was creator and ruler of heaven-and-earth, eternal and unfathomable, and the source of morality. Worshipping the Lord of Heaven is the only true means of moral self-cultivation, for man’s immortal soul will be judged after death.⁸⁰ Ricci made extensive use of scholastic arguments to support his view and to refute erroneous ideas held by Buddhists, Taoists, and some mistaken Confucians

74 Ricci, “Chiao yu lun,” 6a, p. 309. In a note Ricci observed that in the seal style of writing, both words for friend, *p’eng* and *yu*, involve a pair of images.

75 Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, is constructed on the basis of Ricci’s second section, which explains how to use the technique. See Ricci, *Chi fa*, 4b–5b, rpt. in *T’ien-chu chiao tung ch’uan wen-hsien* (Taipei, 1963), pp. 16–18.

76 Ricci, *Chi fa*, 1a, p. 9.

77 See Matteo Ricci, *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Kuo-chien Hu (St Louis, 1985), p. 19. In addition to the translation, this volume also includes an edited version of the Chinese text; another version in two *chüan* that includes prefaces omitted by Lancashire and Hu is in Li Chih-tsao, *T’ien-hsüeh ch’u han*.

78 Ricci, *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, p. 61. Cf. pp. 16–17. There is some overlap between the dialogues in the *T’ien-chu shih yi* and the dialogues in Ricci’s *Chi-jen shih p’ien* (*Ten chapters on the extraordinary man*) of 1608, where mostly Ricci’s interlocutors are named, and include Hsu Kuang-ch’i and Li Chih-tsao.

79 Ricci, *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, p. 56, n. 6. Ricci also explained that in Western countries the Lord of Heaven was called *Tou-ssu*, that is, *Deus*, p. 71.

80 Ricci, *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, pp. 337, 375, 383. Cf. Ricci’s own description, trans. in Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 96–97, from Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 293–95, n. 709.

(*ju*). Toward the end of the dialogues Ricci brought up the subject of Jesus. “[The Lord of Heaven] thereupon acted with great compassion, descended to this world Himself to save it, and experienced everything [experienced by man]. One thousand six hundred and three years ago, on the third day after the winter solstice in the second year of the Yüan-shou period of the Han Emperor Ai, [the Lord of Heaven] chose as his mother a chaste woman who had never experienced sexual intercourse, and He became incarnate in her and was born. His name was Jesus (*yeh-su*), which means ‘saves the world.’ He established his own teachings and taught in the Western lands. In his thirty-third year he reascended to Heaven. These were the true actions of the Lord of Heaven.”⁸¹ Except for this passage, Ricci did not “discuss in depth God’s revelation of Himself in history.”⁸² Rather than arguing from the mysteries of faith, Ricci had the literatus from the west stress that he was responding on the basis of *li*, which presumably Ricci intended as approximately his word for “reason.”⁸³ To his western audience, Ricci was quite explicit about what he was doing in his book in Chinese. “This does not treat of all the mysteries of our holy faith, which need be explained only to catechumens and Christians, but only of certain principles, especially such as can be proved with natural reason (*ragioni naturali*) and understood with the same natural light (*lume naturale*).”⁸⁴ Ricci was not requiring that his broad literati audience first believe in his teachings in order to understand them. He was minimizing the differences by assimilating his teaching to theirs – at least, theirs before it went astray. He told them in his introduction to *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven* that, when he reached their country, “I thought that in China the people of Yao and Shun and the followers of the Duke of Chou and Confucius certainly could not shift and sully the principle of heaven (*t’ien li*) and the Learning from Heaven (*t’ien hsüeh*). But even here it was not avoided.”⁸⁵ In such passages, Ricci’s stance was that his ideas were not wholly new, but were preceded in China’s antiquity. He was not being disingenuous; he was presuming there had been a pre-Christian natural theology. In a letter in 1609 to Pasio, he wrote that, “in ancient times they followed the natural law as faithfully as in our countries. For fifteen hundred years they hardly worshipped idols, and those they did were not as reprehensible as those of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans . . . In the most ancient authoritative

81 Slightly altered from the trans. in Ricci, *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, p. 449.

82 Ricci, *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, p. 24. Lancashire and Hu are thus moved to describe Ricci’s book as a “pre-evangelical dialogue.”

83 Ricci, *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, p. 71.

84 Altered from the trans. in Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 96, from Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 292–93, n. 709. Also see John D. Witek, “Understanding the Chinese,” p. 69, in Ronan and Oh, *East Meets West*.

85 Altered from Ricci, *The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, p. 59.

books of the literati, only heaven and earth and the Lord of both is worshipped. When these books are examined, we discover little which is contrary to the light of reason and much that conforms to it, and their natural philosophies yield to none.”⁸⁶ In his writings in Chinese, Ricci pointed to the many classical passages, particularly in the *Book of Documents* (*Shu ching*) and *Book of Poetry* (*Shih ching*), in which the terms *shang ti* (divinity on high) and *t'ien* (heaven) appear in contexts which treat them as names of a deity (or deities) with extraordinary, nonhuman power which was responsive to human supplication.⁸⁷ For literati who were willing to start with that reading, even though it was not wholly warranted in the contexts of the classics, Ricci was prepared to proceed to the revelations and elaborations which had obtained since antiquity in the Western lands, but not in China.

On the other hand, some of the learning which Ricci introduced to literati in China was unambiguously new. Almost immediately after arriving in Kwangtung, he realized he had an attractive curiosity in the map of the world as it then was known by European cartographers. From 1584, copies were made and circulated, sometimes without his approval.⁸⁸ Comments and annotations, some by Ricci, but others by appreciative viewers, accumulated in the margins and on the open spaces for oceans. Hemispheric views were placed in the corners. The map was printed several times, from wooden blocks. A version dated 1602 measures 4.1 by 1.8 meters.⁸⁹ With the Americas on the right and the Eurasian land mass spreading to Africa at the left margin, China, or *Ta Ming* as it was labeled, was near the middle. It was clearly but a part of a much larger world than had previously been known in China. Ricci would give detailed accounts of how he had traveled, how long it had taken, and the names and wonders of new places.⁹⁰ There was more here

86 Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 386. Also trans. in Jacques Gernet, *Chine et Christianisme: Action et reaction* (Paris, 1982), p. 39, trans. by Janet Lloyd as *China and the Christian impact: A conflict of cultures* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 25.

87 See Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The world of thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), pp. 50–53. Some twentieth-century commentators have implied Ricci was arguing that a fully developed idea of the Christian God was already present in the classical texts from early Chou. It seems to me Ricci was arguing that in the Ancient Theology there were glimmers or adumbrations of the idea of the True God. He was using antique vocabulary with some of the connotations he could assimilate, but he used scholastic arguments to establish the characteristics of the deity which are not apparent in the Chinese classics, particularly those of Creator of all things, omnipotence, and an ontological standing which separates it from our phenomenal world.

88 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. cxxvii, and pp. 207–12, nn. 262–63.

89 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 207. At least eight versions are distinguished in Hung Wei-lien. (William Hung), “K’ao Li Ma-tou te shih-chieh ti t’u,” *Yü kung*, 5.3–4 (1936), p. 28, rpt. in *Li Ma-tou yen-chiu lun chi*, ed. Chou K’ang-hsieh (Hong Kong, 1971), p. 94.

90 For a reproduction of the 1602 map, see *Li Ma-tou k’ün-yüan-kuo ch’üan t’u* (Peiping, 1936), and also Pasqule M. D’Elia, *Il mappamondo cinese del P. Matteo Ricci, S.J.* (Vatican City, 1938). A convenient summary on the maps is in Kenneth Ch’en, “Matteo Ricci’s contribution to and influence on geographical knowledge in China,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 59 (1939), pp. 325–59.

than expanding geographical horizons. Ricci was teaching that the earth is a sphere.

To a literati audience which adhered to the view that the earth is essentially a flat square encompassed by a dome called heaven, Ricci presented clear accounts of the Aristotelian theory of an immobile, spherical earth located at the center of a series of concentric spherical orbs.⁹¹ The first essay in the *Ch'ien k'un t'i i* (*The structure of Heaven and Earth*), a book in three *chüan* printed in 1614 under Ricci's name, described the shape of the heaven and earth: "The lands and oceans are basically of a round shape and conjoined as a unitary globe. They are located at the center of the celestial globe, like the yellow of an egg in the white. As for the assertion that the earth is square, that is referring to the power [of the earth], to its quiescent and unshifting nature; it is not referring to its physical shape."⁹² Ricci explained how, in coming to China (*Chung-kuo*), he had to sail far south of the equator around Africa and thus was on the opposite side of the globe from China. He assured his readers that there one sees the sky above his head, not below. "Therefore all but babies believe that the shape of the earth is round and it has circumference."⁹³ Ricci was similarly unaccommodating when he explained the dimensions and speeds of the eleven encompassing global or spherical heavens (*t'ien*) on which the planets and stars move inside the immobile, outermost sphere. He insisted that there are only four elements (*ssu yüan hsing*), not five as some authors in China maintained, that their characteristics of hot, cold, dry, and damp were as he described them, and that the Creator had separated them from primal chaos in making the universe.⁹⁴

Western mathematics was attractive as a powerful example of learning which seemed universally acceptable on the basis of "reason" and yet which also was then unknown in China.⁹⁵ Ricci had taught some arithmetic and geometry to Ch'ü Ju-k'uei at Shao-chou in the early 1590s,⁹⁶ and it was a regular topic in his discussions at Peking. Perhaps at the instigation of Hsü Kuang-ch'i, in 1606–07 Ricci and Hsü worked on a translation of the first six books of Euclid's *Geometry* in a version arranged by Christopher Clavius (Klau), who had been Ricci's professor in Rome. Their procedure was for Hsü to write as Ricci translated orally from Latin to Chinese. They went quickly,

91 See Peterson, "Western natural philosophy", p. 298.

92 Ricci, *Ch'ien k'un t'i i* (1614), rpt. in *Ssu-k'ü ch'üan-shu chen-pen* 1a, *wu chi* (Taipei, 1974). This essay originally appeared on the maps.

93 Ricci, *Ch'ien k'un t'i i*, p. 2a–b.

94 Ricci, *Ch'ien k'un t'i i*, pp. 5a–6b and 10a–13a.

95 It should be noted that in his prefaces for the mathematics books Hsü Kuang-ch'i, for example, consistently referred to antique precedents in the Chinese past to justify interest in and knowledge of the subjects of the books.

96 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciani*, Vol. 1, pp. 297–98, n. 362.

skipping some parts, and their work was printed in 1608 as the *Chi-bo yüan pen*.⁹⁷ Hsü, in his preface, recorded that Ricci had told him that if Euclid was not translated, the other books (on astronomy in particular) could not be understood.⁹⁸ Other books involving mathematical learning also were translated and printed. There was a short treatise on the astrolabe in 1607. Ricci sometimes referred to it simply as *Sfera* (*Sphere*), but the Chinese title was *Hun-kai t'ung hsien t'u shuo* (*Explanation of the comprehensive rules for the celestial dome*). It was based on Clavius' 1593 book about using a model celestial sphere and an astrolabe for calculating the positions of celestial bodies.⁹⁹ A book on arithmetic, also based on one by Clavius, his *Arimetica Practica*, was translated with Li Chih-tsao and printed in 1613, after Ricci's death, as the *T'ung wen suan chih* (*Guide to calculating in our shared language*).¹⁰⁰ It began by making reference to use of calculating sticks and the abacus, and then explained how westerners added columns of figures, multiplied, and so on. It used Chinese numbers, rather than the so-called Arabic numerals current in Europe. The third *chüan* of the *Ch'ien-k'ün t'i i* explained plane and spherical geometry. Ricci was thus instrumental in making a solid introduction to the western mathematical techniques for understanding and solving problems in astronomy available to readers of Chinese.

The implicit ideal was that as one learned geometry and trigonometry and applied the techniques to analyzing phenomena in the sky (heaven), he also learned that the cosmos (heaven and earth) was structured as taught by Ricci, and as one accepted thinking in terms of that structure, he also might accept the premise that it was made by a Creator (the Lord of Heaven). These exact connections were made succinctly, and more explicitly than Ricci would have condoned, by one of his contemporaries. Strongly influenced by Neo-Platonism, Johannes Kepler in 1610 wrote a letter to Galileo, whose book *Sidereus Nuncius* (*Sidereal messenger*) had just been published in Venice. Kepler declared, "Geometry is one and eternal, shining in the mind of God. That share in it accorded to men is one of the reasons that Man is

97 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 356–60, n. 772. In a note on pp. 358–59, D'Elia briefly indicates the contents of the six books as trans. A more detailed account, with translations of the prefatory material, is in Pasquale D'Elia, "Presentazione della Prima Traduzione Cinese di Euclide," *Monumenta Serica*, 15 (1956), pp. 161–202. For a brief indication of Ricci's mathematical training and Clavius' view on its importance for Jesuits, see Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, pp. 142–43.

98 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, "Hsu," 2b, in Ricci, *Chi-bo yüan pen*, in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u ban*, ed. Li Chih-tsao, Vol. 4, p. 1924. Cf. Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 356, n. 7.

99 See Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. cxxviii, Vol. 2, pp. 174–77, and Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, p. 148. The text is in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u ban*, ed. Li Chih-tsao, Vol. 3.

100 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 175. The text is in Li Chih-tsao, *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u ban*, Vol. 5. The "shared language" seems to have referred to reviving earlier Chinese mathematical vocabulary for the foreign content. See Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 175, n. 2.

the image of God.”¹⁰¹ If one accepted that there was a Creator, he was beginning to understand one of the attributes of the Lord of Heaven, and Ricci was then ready to expound on other attributes of his God as well, including His being the ground of morality and salvation. This was further testimony for the motive for Ricci’s being in Peking, the basis for his confident knowledge of truth, and the source of his strength of character. The ideal was sometimes realized; Ch’ü Ju-k’uei and Li Chih-tsao both were literati who were first attracted to “other” parts of Ricci’s learning and went on to be baptized as Christians. The intellectual process was alluded to in 1601 in a preface written for the *T’ien-chu shih i* by Feng Ying-ching (d. 1607) who did not become a Christian. “Ricci traveled 80,000 *li* [to China]. He measures the heights of the nine heavens and the depths of the nine oceans without the slightest error. He has already fathomed forms and figures [in the sky] which we never have. Having such reliable evidence in these matters, [his teachings about] divine principles (*shen li*) ought to contain no falsehoods.”¹⁰² Certainty involving mathematics and astronomy, as aspects of the Learning from Heaven with no clear demarcation between what we might call science and religion, lent credence to Ricci’s “holy faith.”

For his part, Ricci was keenly aware that he was expediently using these other aspects of western culture to establish his reputation as a man of learning, which was a means both to attract interest in his faith and enhance the opportunities for him and his confreres to propagate it in China. In a letter to Rome in the spring of 1605 he wrote, “Because of my world-maps, clocks, spheres, astrolabes, and the other things I do and teach, I have gained the reputation of being the greatest mathematician in the world, and without any astrology book (*libro di astrologia*), I am able to predict eclipses with the aid of some Portuguese ephemerides and catalogues more accurately than they [i.e., his Chinese hosts].”¹⁰³ (His first fruitless trip to Peking, in 1598, was facilitated by an official of the Ministry of Rites who thought Ricci could be useful in the reform of the calendar.) In the same letter, he said he had been making an unheeded request for several years. “Nothing could be more advantageous than to send some father or brother [of the Society of Jesus] who is a good astrologer (*astrologo*) to this court. I say astrologer because with regard to geometry, clocks, and astrolabes, I know them well enough and have enough books on them. But [the Chinese] do not make so

101 J. Kepler, *Dissertatio cum Nuncio Sidereo*, trans. by J. V. Field, “Astrology in Kepler’s Cosmology,” in *Astrology, science and society*, ed. Patrick Curry (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1987).

102 Feng Ying-ching, “T’ien-chu shih i hsü,” 3a–b, in Li Chih-tsao, *T’ien-hsiieh ch’üan*, Vol. 1, pp. 363–64. Cf. Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 167.

103 Ricci’s letter to João Alvarez, in Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, p. 285, slightly altered from translation in Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 210.

much of these as they do of the course and actual place of the planets, the calculation of eclipses, and especially of one who is able to make ephemerides [i.e., tables from which solar, lunar and planetary positions through the year can be derived] . . . Therefore I say that if this mathematician (*matematico*) of whom I speak should come, we should be able to translate our tables into Chinese, which I do with facility, and undertaking the task of correcting the calendar (*anno*) would enhance our reputation, give us freer entry into China, and assure us of greater security and liberty."¹⁰⁴ Ricci was prescient in foreseeing how the situation would develop, although his request was not realized during his lifetime.

Matteo Ricci died in Peking in the spring of 1610, reportedly worn out from the crush of activities in which he was involved, including receiving many candidates in the capital for the *chih-shih* examination that year.¹⁰⁵ He was at the height of his reputation as a literatus from the west. After memorials to the emperor by Li Chih-tsao and others, imperial permission was granted for a burial ground for Ricci.¹⁰⁶ The *Veritable Records* for the fourth month of the 38th year of the Wan-li reign period simply states, "On the *jen-yin* day [the Emperor] granted some empty ground for burial for Li Ma-tou, the former adjunct officer (*p'ei ch'en*) from the Western Ocean country."¹⁰⁷ After some maneuvering, the Jesuit missionaries took possession of a plot of land outside the city wall which had belonged to a eunuch. It was long and narrow, about 20 *mou* (or 3 acres), surrounded by walls, with most of the south half taken up by more than thirty rooms and halls, one of which became a chapel.¹⁰⁸ Ricci was buried there in 1611.

Of course, propagation of the Learning from Heaven did not end with Ricci. He had nominated Niccolo Longobardo (1559–1655) to be his successor as the mission's Superior. At Ricci's death there were at least seven Jesuits from Europe in China. Diego Pantoja (1571–1618), who had been with Ricci in Peking since 1601, and Sabatino DeUrsis (1575–1620) were in the capital; Alphonso Vagnone (1568–1640) was in Nanking; Lazzaro Cattaneo (1560–1640) was in Shanghai; Gaspar Ferreira (1571–1649) and João da Rocha (1565–1623) were in Nan-ch'ang; and Longobardo was in

104 Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, Vol. 2, pp. 284–85, slightly altered from translation in Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 210–11.

105 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 534–35 and 542; Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 105–07.

106 Henri Bernard, *Aux origines du cimetière de Ch'ala: Le don princier de la Chine au P. Ricci (1610–1611)* (Tientsin, 1934), summarizes the Western language evidence on the events surrounding Ricci's death and burial.

107 *Mingshibu* (1418–mid seventeenth century; rpt. Taipei, 1966), *Shen-tsungshih-lu*, ch. 470, 8b (p. 8884). *P'ei ch'en* was a term from the Chou dynasty which referred to officials from other states who reached the court of the Chou king and was sometimes used to refer to officers from a tributary state.

108 Bernard, *Aux origines*, pp. 35–36.

Shao-chou.¹⁰⁹ There were eight Jesuit Brothers who were Chinese, and an estimated 2,500 Chinese Catholics.¹¹⁰ Most influentially, there were a handful of literati and officials who were sympathizers or converts to the Learning of the Way.

LITERATI WHO ASSOCIATED THEMSELVES WITH THE LEARNING
FROM HEAVEN: THE THREE PILLARS

From the beginning of Ricci's stay in Kwangtung, literati manifested their interest in different facets of the learning which he brought from the far west. In responding to their interests, Ricci was led to involvement with some of them in a program of translating and printing books which continued after Ricci's death. Literati assisted other Jesuits' books by contributing to the translation and editing and to the printing, especially in the form of pre-faces endorsing the book but also in the form of money toward publishing costs. Literati also wrote and printed their own books on topics related to the Learning from Heaven, and theirs formed a corpus with those published in the missionaries' names that continued to accumulate to the end of the Ming period.

Hsü Kuang-ch'i (1562–1633) was the most prominent literatus associated with the Learning from Heaven, both in the eyes of his contemporaries and in the view of later writers. Born in the then small town of Shanghai to a father who was engaged in commerce and a mother from a local literati family, Hsü grew up in sometimes straitened financial circumstances, due in part to the devastating piratical raids on the coastal areas during his childhood years. He passed the prefectural examination in his twentieth year, but he failed in at least four attempts at the Nanking provincial examinations from 1582 to 1594, just the years Ricci was establishing himself in Kwangtung.¹¹¹ After his mother died in 1592 Hsü accepted employment as a teacher for the sons of an official appointed as a prefect in Kwangsi.¹¹² On the way south from Kiangsi, Hsü passed through Shao-chou, where he visited the chapel established by Ricci, who by this time was on his way north in his literati

109 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 120, 122, 126. Nicolas Trigault and Manoel Dias arrived in Macao in 1610. For the spelling of the Jesuits' names and their dates, I have followed Joseph Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine de 1552 à 1800*, *Bibliotheca Instituti Historici S.I.* (Rome, 1973), Vol. 37.

110 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 1, p. 289, n. 4. The eight Brothers are discussed in Harris, "The mission of Matteo Ricci," pp. 147–51.

111 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u* (Shanghai, 1981), pp. 33–53. Also see Wang Chung-min, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i*, ed. Ho chao-wu (Shanghai, 1981), pp. 5–8, 14–15. For a short summary of Hsü Kuang-ch'i's life, see the entry in Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period* (Washington, DC, 1943–44), pp. 316–19.

112 Wang Chung-min, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i*, pp. 16–17, 22–23, and Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-p'u*, pp. 57–58.

robes. Hsü chatted with the missionary at the chapel, Lazzaro Cattaneo, and was shown a picture of the Savior.¹¹³ In 1597, still in the entourage of the official who had hired him to teach his sons, Hsü went to Peking, where that autumn he again tried the provincial examination. He passed with the top rank, and though he failed the metropolitan examination the following spring, he returned to Shanghai in 1598 as a *chü-jen* of high repute and as a de facto follower of the chief examiner in 1597, Chiao Hung.¹¹⁴ For twenty years, roughly 1582 to 1602, Hsü prepared for the examinations and compiled dozens of conventional manuscripts of reading notes and comments on the classics and other texts.¹¹⁵ As his friend pointed out in 1603, his efforts had been strongly oriented to the Classics,¹¹⁶ and he continued as an indefatigable writer and compiler. But Hsü's life was about to take a turn.

Hsü Kuang-ch'i had already heard of Ricci and his world map when they first met in the spring of 1600 in Nanking.¹¹⁷ Ricci recalled that as Hsü was in a hurry he was only able to hear a little about serving "the Creator of heaven and earth and Author of all things," that is, the Lord of Heaven.¹¹⁸ After their brief encounter, Ricci set off on his second attempt at Peking. In the winter of 1603, Hsü again traveled from Shanghai to Nanking. He called on João da Rocha, who was in charge of the mission there, and pressed to be instructed in the faith. He read and memorized manuscript copies of Chinese translations of a catechism and *Christian Doctrine* (*Dottrina Cristiana*), which probably was a version of Ricci's *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*T'ien chu shih i*). He discussed the doctrine with da Rocha, and within ten days Hsü Kuang-ch'i was baptized as Paolo.¹¹⁹ He returned to Shanghai for the New Year with his family, but then was back in Nanking, where he lodged with da Rocha and heard mass every day.¹²⁰ In the spring of 1604 Hsü proceeded to Peking, where he found Ricci and received communion. Going in again for the metropolitan examinations, he passed to become a *chin-shih*. To start his official career he was appointed to the Hanlin Academy, which afforded Hsü ample opportunity to develop a working relation with Ricci.¹²¹

113 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 253, n. 681, which is the original source for the incident. Cf. Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-pu*, p. 57, and Wang Chung-min, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i*, pp. 22–23.

114 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-pu*, pp. 59–61.

115 The titles, most of which are lost, are given in Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-pu*, p. 69.

116 See Wang Chung-min, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i*, p. 24.

117 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, "Pa Erh-shih-wu yen," in *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, ed. Wang Chung-min (Shanghai, 1963), Vol. 1, p. 86.

118 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 253, n. 681. Also quoted in Willard Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?" in Ronan and Oh, *East Meets West*, p. 143.

119 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 254–55, n. 682. Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 69, and Wang Chung-min, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i*, p. 24.

120 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 255, n. 683. Also cited in Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?" p. 144.

121 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 308, n. 714.

Almost immediately, Hsü wrote a postscript for Ricci's soon to be published booklet entitled *Erh-shih-wu yen* (Twenty-five Discourses), which were selections drawn from the doctrines attributed in the *Encheiridion* to Epictetus, a second century Stoic.¹²² Hsü recalled his first contacts with Ricci, but did not directly mention his baptism at the end of the previous year. He wrote that Ricci's learning (*hsüeh*), touching on every subject, had as its main doctrine the continuous and open service of the Divinity on High (*shang ti*). All Ricci said and wrote was in accord with precepts of being loyal to one's ruler and filial to one's father, of improving the individual's mind and the society's well being. Hsü acknowledged he had been sceptical at first, but as he came to comprehend the explanations, ". . . I took it to heart and asked to serve."¹²³ Hsü added that he had remarked to Ricci that more of the many books he had brought should be translated, and of course that is what Ricci already was of a mind to do. Hsü himself became involved. In 1606 and 1607, after his duties at the Hanlin Academy, he spent hours of afternoons with Ricci, preparing the Chinese version of the *Geometry*.¹²⁴ In 1607, Hsü also worked with Ricci to complete a little book on surveying, the *Ts'e liang fa i* (*Methods and Interpretation of Surveying*), which Ricci had started ten years earlier.¹²⁵ Their direct collaboration ended when Hsü's father, who had been baptized, died in the fifth month of 1607. Hsü resigned his official appointment and returned to Shanghai.¹²⁶ Before Hsü returned to the capital in 1610, Ricci himself was dead.

Hsü Kuang-ch'i continued to be involved in the Learning from Heaven. While in mourning, he worked on the publication of the *Chi-ho yüan pen* and the *Ts'e liang fa i*, and he wrote a treatise on triangles and another comparing Western methods of surveying and the earliest extant Chinese textual materials on surveying.¹²⁷ In 1608, he invited Cattaneo to move from Nanking to Shanghai, and had a chapel built near his own home.¹²⁸ Hsü traveled to Macao to inspect the situation there.

122 See Christopher Spalatin, "Matteo Ricci's use of Epictetus' *Encheiridion*," *Gregorianum*, 56, No. 3 (1975), pp. 551-57.

123 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, "Pa Erh-shih-wu yen," *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, Vol. 1, p. 87. Also see Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?," pp. 145-46.

124 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 357, n. 772. Cf. Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 81.

125 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, "T'i Ts'e liang fa i," *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, Vol. 1, p. 82. If Ricci had discussed surveying methods with Hsü when they met in Nanking in 1600, it would undermine the claim by Wang Chung-min that Hsü was especially interested in applied mathematics before he was involved with Ricci, as the only evidence for his early interest is a set of explanations on surveying he apparently sent to the magistrate of Shanghai in 1603. See Wang Chung-min, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i*, pp. 22-23.

126 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-p'u*, pp. 85-86.

127 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-p'u*, pp. 88 and 92.

128 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-p'u*, p. 89.

When he reached Peking in 1610, Hsü was reappointed to the Hanlin Academy. He also began collaborating with Pantoja and deUrsis on texts dealing with astronomical instruments and calendrical tables.¹²⁹ After a solar eclipse late in 1610 was inaccurately predicted by officials at the Directorate of Astronomy, the two westerners' names were submitted as calendar experts in response to a call from the Ministry of Rites, and at the beginning of 1612, a memorial from the Ministry proposed that Hsü Kuang-ch'i and Li Chih-tsao (who was serving in the Ministry of Works in Nanking) be ordered along with Longobardo and deUrsis to translate western works relevant to calendars lest the errors become more egregious.¹³⁰ Nothing came of that proposal, but in 1612, Hsü wrote down from deUrsis' oral translation a collection of ideas and advice based on Western ideas on water technology. In his preface, Hsü wrote that Ricci had instigated the project, and he had proposed to deUrsis that they complete it.¹³¹ When published, the *T'ai-hsi shui fa* (*Western methods involving water*) consisted of four *chüan* of advice, some of it technical and some lore (e.g., how to site a well), one *chüan* of answers to questions about water and solutions based on the Aristotelian four elements theory, and one *chüan* of rudimentary illustrations of boilers, storage tanks, and water moving devices. DeUrsis added an introductory essay on fundamentals which opened with the cardinal assumption, "The making of the ten thousand things of heaven and earth long ago by the Lord, Creator of Things, is like the use of tools in a master craftsman's making a palace." The tools and materials used by the Creator, it was argued, were the four elements (earth, water, air, and fire), and if one understands them, he understands how heaven and earth and all phenomenal things are put together.¹³² Again, the connection was being made between technology, natural philosophy, and the religious implications of a supreme, omnipotent deity. In his own 1612 preface for the *T'ai-hsi shui fa*, Hsü set the context from another perspective. "I have said that this religious doctrine (*chiao*) certainly can 'supplement Confucianism and change Buddhism' (*pu ju i fo*), and the remainder [of the teachings] moreover has a type of learning (*hsüeh*) involving 'investigating things and fathoming their coherence' (*ko wu ch'üing li*), so that whether it is a question about within or outside of the realm of human society, whether about the coherence of the 10,000 [human] affairs or of the 10,000 things [in the realm of heaven and earth], they can endlessly respond with extremely detailed explanations. When one thinks them over, whether for months or years, he increasingly

129 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-p'u*, p. 97.

130 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-p'u*, pp. 93 and 98–99, quoting from the *Ming Shih-lu*.

131 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, "T'ai-hsi shui fa hsü," *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, pp. 67–68. Two other prefaces also credit Ricci; see Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü nien-p'u*, pp. 99–100.

132 deUrsis, "Shui fa pen lun," 12, in *T'ai-hsi shui fa*, in Li Chih-tsao, *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han*, Vol. 3, p. 1549.

sees the necessity and immutability of their theories.”¹³³ Hsü was arguing for the incorporation of the theories being introduced by the westerners into the learning of the literati.

Hsü made the point in a different way in the preface he wrote in 1614 for the *T'ung wen suan chih* (*Guide to calculating in our shared language*). He used the same metaphor of the tools and materials of the craftsman building a palace as had deUrsis (but without mentioning a Creator) to show the practical importance of mathematics, which he called the art of calculating (*suan shu*). According to Hsü, from the time of the sages of high antiquity until the T'ang dynasty, mathematical learning had an important place, but it had particularly declined in the last few hundred years (i.e., since the Sung dynasty). He gave two reasons for this. Confucian philosophers had come to denigrate the practical affairs of the world, and charlatans had claimed to predict the future by means of the mysteries of numbers (*shu*). Thus, the constructive, useful mathematical techniques of antiquity atrophied, and the books transmitting them were mostly lost to the literati. But the numbers one to ten are shared by all countries, just as all humans have ten fingers and use them to count. Hsü wrote that his friend Li Chih-tsao had searched for remnants of the ancient mathematics, and then at Peking, he worked with Ricci and his confreres, whose calendrical and numerical learning was more refined and far more extensive than what remained from Han and T'ang. After reading the manuscript Li prepared with Ricci, Hsü joined with Li in comparing old Chinese techniques with the Western ones and found they were congruent. It was Li Chih-tsao who then combined the two traditions and published the book entitled *T'ung wen suan chih* (*Guide to calculating in our shared language*).¹³⁴

Li Chih-tsao (1565–1630) was another prominent literatus who became involved in the Learning of Heaven. He was from Hangchow and passed the *chin-shih* examination in 1598. He was serving in the Ministry of Works when, he recalled years later, “In 1601, Ricci had come [to Peking]. I went with several associates to call on him. Hanging on his wall was a map of the world with finely drawn lines of degree [of longitude and latitude]. Ricci said, ‘This was my route from the West.’”¹³⁵ Ricci recorded that Li was attracted to the greatly expanded geography of the countries and continents on the map,¹³⁶ but it seems that Li was even more fascinated with the new

133 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, “T'ai-hsi shui fa,” *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, p. 66. Also in Willard Peterson, “Why did they become Christians?,” p. 147.

134 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, “K'e T'ung-wen suan chih hsü,” *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, pp. 79–81.

135 Li Chih-tsao, Preface dated 1623 to Aleni, *Chih-fangwai chi*, 1a, in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'üan*, ed. Li Chih-tsao, Vol. 3, p. 1269. Also quoted in Peterson, “Why did they become Christians?,” p. 137.

136 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 168, n. 628.

model of the earth as a sphere. Li recalled that after seeing the map he did his own calculations to verify Ricci's claim for its size and spherical shape and for its location at the center of the spherical heavens.¹³⁷ As Ricci described it, "With his great intelligence he easily grasped the truths we taught about the extent and sphericity of the earth, its poles, the ten [concentric] heavens, the vastness of [the spheres of] the sun and stars compared to the earth, and other things which other men found so difficult to believe."¹³⁸ Li helped prepare an enlarged version of the map, which was printed in 1602 with a long note by Li in which he reviewed Chinese precedents for the idea of a spherical earth divided into degrees, as was the sphere of the stellar heaven. He endorsed the ideas that the earth was much larger than previously thought and that spherical heavens encompassed it.¹³⁹ According to Ricci, "From this a close friendship developed between us, and when the duties of his office allowed it, he liked to learn more of this knowledge (*questa scientia*)."¹⁴⁰ Over the next few years Li learned from Ricci about Western mathematics and astronomy, including making and using gnomons, astrolabes, and celestial and terrestrial globes. They translated a treatise on the sphere and astrolabe in 1607, entitled the *Hun kai t'ung-hsien t'u shuo* (*Explanation of the comprehensive rules for the celestial dome*).¹⁴¹ In his preface, Li Chih-tsao provided an extended argument for understanding the earth is a relatively small sphere in the midst of the encompassing heavenly spheres.¹⁴²

Li Chih-tsao wrote prefaces for Ricci's *T'ien chu shih i* (*True meaning of the Lord of Heaven*) in 1607, and for his *Chi-jen shih p'ien* (*Ten essays on the extraordinary man*) in 1608. In the latter, Li said that he had known Ricci for nearly a decade and now realized that when he is going to do something and it accords with Ricci's words, then he knows he should do it, and if it does not, then he knows to not do it.¹⁴³ At about this same time Ricci wrote of Li, "He is very well instructed in matters of our Holy Faith and stood ready to be baptized if the Fathers had not discovered the impediment of polygamy, which

137 Li Chih-tsao, Preface to *Chih-fang wai chi*, 1b–2a, in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han*, ed. Li Chih-tsao, Vol. 3, pp. 1270–71.

138 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 170–71, n. 628; also in Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?" p. 137.

139 Li Chih-tsao's note in the mid-Pacific in [Li Chih-tsao?], *Li Ma-tou ch'üan t'u* (Peiping, 1936). Cf. Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?" p. 141. Also see Ricci's prefatory note on the 1602 map for Li Chih-tsao's role in producing the enlarged version.

140 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 171, n. 628.

141 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, pp. 173–78, n. 631.

142 Li Chih-tsao, "Hsü," in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han*, ed. Li Chih-tsao, Vol. 3, pp. 1711–22. Li did not include Ricci's name as an author, only his own.

143 Li Chih-tsao, "Chi-jen shih p'ien hsü," 1a–2a, in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han*, ed. Li Chih-tsao, Vol. 1, pp. 101–03.

he promises to rid from his house."¹⁴⁴ Presumably Li Chih-tsao had sent his concubine away by 1610, when he fell critically ill. Ricci attended to him day and night for several weeks, and he urged Li to declare his faith. Li agreed, and was baptized as Leone. He also donated a hundred taels of silver for the church.¹⁴⁵ Li recovered, but Ricci died in the spring of that year. Li continued to be involved in the Learning from Heaven. He resigned from office in the spring of 1611 to be with his ailing father. Returning home to Hangchow, he invited Cattaneo and Trigault to join him there. He seems to have entrusted them with "matters relating to the rites of death" after his father died,¹⁴⁶ and his reliance on them seems to have stimulated his friend Yang T'ing-yün to learn more about their religious faith.

Yang T'ing-yün (1557–1627) met Cattaneo and Trigault when they were in Hangchow with Li Chih-tsao. A *chin-shih* in 1592, he was appointed as the district magistrate of An-fu in Chi-an prefecture, Kiangsi, which was still a center for discourses on learning (*chiang hsiieh*) promoting Wang Yang-ming's teachings.¹⁴⁷ One of the leading figures there was Liu Yüan-ch'ing (1544–1609), a 1570 *chü-jen* who supposedly failed his only attempt at the metropolitan examination because of his criticism of current politics. He returned to An-fu and taught at an academy (*shu-yüan*) established there in 1572.¹⁴⁸ Liu held that "Discourses on learning are nothing more than gathering colleagues to clarify moral relations," and that "Without discourses, learning cannot be made clear."¹⁴⁹ Yang T'ing-yün was acquainted with Liu Yüan-ch'ing, and with Tsou Yüan-piao (1551–1624), who was involved in discourses and academies at nearby Chi-shui.¹⁵⁰ While serving as a censor Yang contributed money and writing toward the establishment of the Tung-lin Academy in 1603–04, and he participated in meetings there in the next few years.¹⁵¹ While an education intendant in Nanking he edited a new printing of Ch'iu Chün's (1418–95) version of the *Chia li* (*family Rituals*) attributed to Chu Hsi. Yang's preface appears with others by officials in Chiang-nan, including several affiliated with the Tung-lin Academy.¹⁵² During the years Yang also

144 Ricci, *Fonti Ricciane*, Vol. 2, p. 178, n. 632. Also in Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?," p. 139.

145 Fang Hao, *Li Chih-tsaoyen-chiu* (Taipei, 1966), p. 29. Also see Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?," p. 139.

146 See Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?," p. 139.

147 Nicolas Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün Confucian and Christian in late Ming China: His life and thought* (Leiden, 1988), pp. 7–8. Standaert's is the most detailed, but not wholly integrated, account of the Chinese and Western language materials on Yang's life.

148 Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming ju hsiieh an*, ch. 21, p. 498. Cf. Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 9.

149 Slightly altered from translation in Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 10.

150 See Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, pp. 111–12.

151 Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 35.

152 Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, pp. 46–47. One of the prefaces was by Fang Ta-chien (1558–1631), son of Fang Hsüeh-chien (see above), and grandfather of Fang I-chih (see below).

became friendly with such artistic types as Ch'en Chi-ju (1558–1639) and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1556–1636) in Sung-chiang, and Li Jih-hua in Chia-hsing.¹⁵³ When Yang resigned from office in 1609 on a plea of illness and returned to Hangchow,¹⁵⁴ he became active there in discourses on learning. With the encouragement of the governor of Chekiang, Yang organized a study group called the Truth Society (*Chen shih she*) to propagate the Learning of the Way.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, Yang contributed money and other support to local Buddhist temples and lay societies.¹⁵⁶ Lay Buddhism was a flourishing movement in Hangchow at this time, led by the monk Chu-hung (1535–1615).¹⁵⁷ In 1605, Kao P'an-lung had gone to Hangchow to visit the West Lake; he remarked on the number of literati there who admired Chu-hung and his books, even though he attacked Chu Hsi and the established doctrines in order to promote that “other strand” (*i tuan*), Buddhism.¹⁵⁸ Yang seems to have been able to contribute both to Kao P'an-lung's efforts at restoring discipline to the Learning of the Way at the Tung-lin Academy and to Chu-hung's efforts at restoring discipline in Buddhism to clerics and lay adherents. A man with wide horizons, Yang had performed well as an official, had been involved in the most prominent intellectual, artistic, and religious circles of the day, and seemed to have access to ample wealth in one of the most attractive cities in the empire.¹⁵⁹ He was a successful literatus affiliated with organized religious pursuits when he met Cattaneo and Trigault in 1611.

Earlier, Yang had been friendly with Ricci in Peking, but without being attracted to his teachings. He was attracted when he met the two missionaries in Hangchow, and he engaged them in a series of discussions, even inviting them to be guests in his house. Gradually, Yang was persuaded that the Lord of Heaven is the creator of heaven and earth, that He suffered when He descended to earth to live as a man to atone for the world's sins, and that to serve Him requires a commitment to the rules of morality and ritual which belief in the religion impose. After sending away his concubine, Yang was baptized as Michele in the sixth month of 1611, two months

153 Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, pp. 26–31. Li Jih-hua was a *chin-shih* in Yang's year, 1592, and remained out of office after 1604. See DMB, Vol. 1, pp. 826–27.

154 Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 12.

155 Ting Chih-lin, *Yang Ch'i-yüan hsien-sheng ch'ao hsing shih chi* (a late Ming print is in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, Courant No. 3370), 1a–b. Ting wrote this account from the dictation of Aleni, who had known Yang. Also see Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 52.

156 Ting Chih-lin, *Yang Ch'i-yüan hsien-sheng ch'ao hsing shih chi*. Also Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 40.

157 See Yü Chün-fang, *The renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the late Ming synthesis* (New York, 1981), pp. 76–87, and her chapter in this volume.

158 Kao P'an-lung, *Kao tzu i-shu* (late Ming; rpt. Taipei, 1983), 3.52a–b. Also cited in Gemet, *Chine et christianisme*, p. 37 (In English translation, pp. 252–53).

159 Cf. the summary in Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 225.

after he first met Cattaneo and Trigault. He was in his fifty-fifth year.¹⁶⁰ Yang is the primary example of a literatus who pursued the religious aspects of the Learning of Heaven and was relatively indifferent to the scientific ones. He wrote in a preface for the *T'ung wen suan chih* in 1614 that, unlike Hsü Kuang-ch'i and Li Chih-tsao, he could not comprehend the mathematics taught by Ricci.¹⁶¹ Instead, he wrote on moral and religious questions, in effect continuing Ricci's strategy of accommodating the religious teachings from the West with selected aspects of the Chinese philosophical tradition.

A few years after his conversion, Yang corrected Pantoja's book called the *Ch'i k'e* (*Seven [Sins] to Overcome*), which was finished in 1614. In his preface Yang reduced the Jesuits' message to two precepts: "To venerate the One Lord of Heaven above the myriad creatures, and to love all others as oneself."¹⁶² He pointed to passages in the classical texts of "us Confucians" (*wu ju*) which convey the same ideas, as in "serving the divinity on high" (*shih shang-ti*, in *Book of poetry*, no. 236) or "offending Heaven" (*tsui yü t'ien*, in *Analects* 3.13). Yang assimilated Pantoja's moral exhortations to the established vocabulary of the Learning of the Way, notably Chang Tsai's "Western Inscription." In Yang's summary, "To overcome pride, to temper rage, to free oneself from desire, to oppose parsimony, to avoid jealousy, to be temperate in eating and drinking, and to be rid of idleness are seven overcomings [of sin] in order to do good. By overcoming the bad in one's mind, one can plant the seeds of virtue in his mind. What provides love is purely the Mind of the Way (*tao hsin*), and the Mind of the Way is purely the Mind of Heaven (*t'ien hsin*)."¹⁶³ Yang was freely associating the vocabulary of discourses on morality with the new meaning for Heaven being promoted by the missionaries. He was evolving a means to incorporate the new ideas into his own.

Yang T'ing-yün, with Li Chih-tsao and Hsü Kuang-ch'i, later became known as the Three Pillars of Christianity in China. Their relatively recent commitment to the religion and the missionaries was put to a test in 1616–17.

160 This summary is drawn from the account in Ting Chih-lin, *Yang Ch'i-yüan ch'ao hsing shih chi*, 4a–5a. Cf. Peterson, "Why did they become Christians?" pp. 131–34, and Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 54. Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 114, gives the date of Yang's baptism as 1613, but early that year Trigault was on his way to Europe to solicit books and astronomically trained Jesuits for the China mission.

161 Yang T'ing-yün, preface to 1b–2a, in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'üan*, *T'ung wen suan chih*, ed. Li Chih-tsao, Vol. 5, pp. 2904–05. Cf. Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 53.

162 Slightly altered from the translation in Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 120.

163 Altered from the translation in Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 121.

Attack on the missionaries at Nanking

Since 1611, the Nanking mission had flourished. Shen Te-fu (1578–1642) observed that Chinese literati (*chung-t'u shih-jen*) teaching the ideas from the Western Ocean were everywhere, and particularly in Nanking.¹⁶⁴ Vagnoni was the superior there, and under him, a church was constructed along western lines on a site purchased by Li Chih-tsao, lay societies were organized for charity and study, and the number of converts increased.¹⁶⁵ But the missionaries began to be squeezed from two directions. The provincial of Japan, Valentim Carvalho (1559–1630) moved to Macao in 1614 to evade the rigorous proscription of Christianity then underway in Japan. He had authority over the Jesuit missionaries in China, and in 1615, he instructed them to cease giving instruction in mathematics and to refuse to become involved with any official undertaking of calendar reform. (This was directed against deUrsis and Pantoja in Peking.) Instead, they were to concentrate on preaching.¹⁶⁶ Presumably in response to Carvalho's order, Vagnoni put more emphasis on preaching in the Nanking church and on drawing more public attention to church activities as a means of attracting more converts.¹⁶⁷ At the same time, Shen Ch'üeh (d. 1624) took up an appointment as Vice-Minister of Rites at Nanking in 1615.¹⁶⁸ Like Yang T'ing-yün, Shen was a 1592 *chin-shih* from Hangchow, and they must have been acquainted. Shen had served in the Hanlin Academy, and he was to return to Peking to be a grand secretary in 1621–22, perhaps in alliance with Wei Chung-hsien. The year after his arrival in Nanking, Shen began a series of memorials in which he proposed the expulsion of the foreign missionaries, the punishment of their followers, and the suppression of the Learning from Heaven movement. It was the gravest crisis for the Christians since Ricci left Kwangtung.

In the summer of 1616, Shen Ch'üeh submitted his first memorial denouncing, by name, Vagnoni and Diaz in Nanking, and Pantoja and deUrsis in Peking.¹⁶⁹ He stressed that they were foreign barbarians whose presence had no legal or other basis and should no longer be condoned. They may claim that they have come and been transformed (i.e., become Chinese), but they call their country Great West Ocean (*Ta Hsi-yang*), which rivals our Great

164 Shen Te-fu, "Ta Hsi-yang," in his *Wan-li Yeh-huo pien* (1619; rpt. Peking, 1980), Vol. 3, p. 784.

165 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 121. 166 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 123.

167 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 125.

168 For a summary of Shen Ch'üeh's career, see DMB, Vol. 2, pp. 1177–78.

169 Shen Ch'üeh's memorial is trans. in Edward Thomas Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–1617 in Nanking" (Diss., Columbia University, 1971), pp. 277–82. Kelly's study, the most detailed account of the affair, judiciously draws on Chinese and Western sources. He includes the Chinese text of Shen's memorials, as they appeared in *P'o hsieh chi*, ed. Hsü Ch'ang-chih, originally compiled in 1639, but preserved only in Japan, where it was reprinted in 1855.

Ming (*Ta Ming*), and they call their doctrine the Teaching of the Lord of Heaven (*T'ien chu chiao*), which conflicts with the imperial implications of such terms as heaven's king (*t'ien wang*), and the Son of Heaven (*t'ien tzu*) who rules all-under-heaven (*t'ien hsia*). Although he had been aware of the presence of Ricci and other missionaries in Peking, Shen said when he arrived in Nanking he discovered the barbarians had attracted a crowd of adherents among the commoners, and that even some learned literati believed their theories. Shen charged that the barbarians misled the common people to turn away from ritual veneration of their ancestors in order to worship the Lord of Heaven instead. (It is ironic that critics of Ricci's strategy among the Christian community in China and elsewhere faulted it for condoning the continued worship of ancestors by converts.)¹⁷⁰ They induced the poor with charity and money rewards to join them, and Shen insinuated that there must be rebellious intentions behind their organizing efforts. There was the same insinuation in Shen's dwelling at length on the Western barbarians' knowledge of calendars and celestial phenomena, which normally was the prerogative of the emperor's agents. Acknowledging that they had been recommended by the Ministry of Rites in 1611 to assist in correcting the astronomical basis for calculating the imperial calendar, Shen stressed that their knowledge was different, and dangerous. He sought to display his own knowledge of the tradition of calendar making. He pointed out in particular that the barbarians' claim that the sun, moon, and five planets each has its own heaven (*t'ien*) moving at different speeds and at different distances from the center of the earth was contrary both to what had been known about the patterns of heaven since antiquity in China (*chung-kuo*) and also to the analogous political idea of one ruler on earth.

His first memorial receiving no response from the emperor, Shen sent in another early in the autumn of 1616 in which he added that the foreign barbarians held regular clandestine meetings with their adherents in Nanking, and that they maintained a residence near the tomb of the Hung-wu emperor, again insinuating some anti-dynastic purpose. He expressed his concern that some literati and officials were sympathetic to them and their teachings, including their numerical arts.¹⁷¹ Although Shen Ch'üeh's motives for attacking the missionaries remain the subject for speculation,¹⁷² the rationale offered in his and in memorials by others aligned with him has three main aspects: they are foreign barbarians whose presence is unwarranted and potentially

170 See Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius?*, pp. 74–76, and Gernet, *Chine et Christianisme*, pp. 247–52 (In English trans., pp. 181–85).

171 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–1617," pp. 282–86.

172 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–1617," pp. 108–23, reviews the evidence and some of the speculations.

dangerous to China; they are organizing poor commoners, which is socially disruptive and potentially anti-dynastic; and they have admirers among the literati, which is divisive and apparently anti-traditional.¹⁷³

Although the literati associated with the Learning from Heaven were not named in Shen Ch'üeh's memorial, they knew they were being attacked as well. Hsü Kuang-ch'i returned to his post in the Hanlin Academy in the seventh month of 1616 after recuperating from an illness,¹⁷⁴ and the next month he wrote a letter to his family in Shanghai to tell them the gentlemen from the West (*hsi yang hsien-sheng*) had been impeached in memorials from the Ministry of Rites. Hsü said he did not know why, nor did he know why Shen Ch'üeh had suddenly turned against them. He could not understand why the issue of spying had come up after the missionaries had been living in the capital for seventeen years, but he had assurances from a eunuch that the emperor understood the situation. Hsü told his family to ready the western hall in their residence for the Nanking missionaries in case they reached Shanghai.¹⁷⁵

Hsü Kuang-ch'i, whose rank as a corrector in the Hanlin Academy was lower than Shen Ch'üeh's, submitted his own long memorial to the emperor.¹⁷⁶ Shen's first memorial, or a summary, had appeared in the Capital Report (*Ti pao*), which Hsü referred to explicitly in his memorial. Hsü said he was familiar with the learning of the men from far away. (He avoided using any term with the implication of barbarian.) He had discussed their teachings with them and been involved in the writing and printing of their books. He also had investigated their method of calendar making and had memorialized on their behalf. Thus, he was one of those officials who believed in them, as alluded to in Shen Ch'üeh's memorial. If the "adjunct officers" (*p'ei ch'ien*, which was the term in the Wan-li emperor's decree allowing Ricci to be buried at the capital) ought to be punished, how, Hsü asked rhetorically, could he avoid being punished. He pointed out that there were many historical precedents for foreigners residing in China; he particularly cited the

173 In his discussion of Shen Ch'üeh's arguments, E. Zürcher also discerned three main ones: the missionaries were promoting "immoral activities," "suspect political activities and affiliations," and "subversive activities among the people." See E. Zürcher, "The first Anti-Christian movement in China (Nanking, 1616–1621)," in *Acta Orientalia Neerlandica, Proceedings of the Congress of the Dutch Oriental Society*, ed. P. W. Pestman (Leiden, 1971), p. 191. Zürcher pointed out that Shen was critical of the missionaries' influence both among commoners and literati.

174 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 113.

175 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, Eleventh letter, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, Vol. 2, p. 492.

176 Hsü's memorial, which exists in several versions, is in *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, Vol. 2, pp. 431–37. It is trans. in Kelly, pp. 294–302, and in E. G. Bridgman, "Paul Su's Apology, addressed to the emperor Wanli of the Ming dynasty, in behalf of the Jesuit missionaries, Pantoja and others, who had been impeached by the Board of Rites in a Report dated the 44th year, 7th month of his reign (AD 1617 [sic])," *The Chinese Repository*, 19 (Canton, 1850), pp. 118–26.

Hung-wu emperor's employing Muslims (*Hui-hui ta-shih*) to translate books from Arabic on calendar making. Hsü did not add that a Muslim office continued to be staffed at the Directorate of Astronomy, but he did note that temples (mosques) for worship according to the Islamic religion were everywhere but its canonical texts had not been translated into Chinese to be checked (for immoral or seditious doctrines). Hsü stressed that every aspect of the teachings and conduct of the "adjunct officers" was impeccably correct and wholly compatible with the Way of the sages. Their learning could be used to serve Confucianism and salvage Buddhism. Rather than being socially disruptive or morally corrupting, Hsü claimed, they encourage all men to do good with their idea of serving Heaven and loving all humans. Evidence for this, Hsü argued, was the harmony which had prevailed for centuries among the Western countries. He proposed that, instead of sending the "adjunct officers" away, the emperor should summon them to the capital to be examined, to translate their books, to debate the Taoists or Buddhists who would slander them, and then to be judged by competent officials. They should be allowed to spread their teachings to literati and commoners, to rich and poor wherever they reside, and to be required to report periodically on their followers' and their own conduct. If they ever were to do any wrong, of course they should be sent away. Near the end of his memorial Hsü mentioned in passing that the matter of reforming the calendar was hardly relevant (which might lead one to infer that proposals to involve missionaries in calculating the imperial calendars were at the heart of the affair).¹⁷⁷ Hsü was compelled by Shen's attack to do what missionaries since Ricci had wanted; he was requesting formal permission from the emperor for the propagation of the Christian religion by foreigners. Just a year before, in 1615, Vagnoni had again urged that such permission be sought from the emperor, but he had been dissuaded by Hsü Kuang-ch'i and others on the grounds that it was still not expedient.¹⁷⁸

Yang T'ing-yün was living in retirement in Hangchow when he learned of Shen Ch'üeh's first memorial. According to Jesuits' accounts he wrote letters on their behalf to his friends in Peking, and he invited missionaries into his residence. Soon Cattaneo, Longobardo, Aleni, Sambiasi, and Pierre van Spiere (1584–1628) were sheltered by him.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps at this time, Yang wrote an essay particularly addressed to the idea that the religion of the Lord of Heaven (*T'ien chu chiao*) from the western countries was clearly not to be regarded as an evil or heretical religion (*hsieh chiao*) such as the White

177 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, "Pien hsüeh chang-shu," *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, Vol. 2, pp. 431–36.

178 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–1617," pp. 31–32; cf. Dunne *Generation of giants*, pp. 120–21.

179 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–1617," pp. 39 and 191–92, from Jesuit sources.

Lotus heretical religion. He gave fourteen points on which they were different, but they all seem to derive from his first point, which was that heretical religions induce men to do evil but the western religion only induces men to do good.¹⁸⁰ Yang proposed that the doctrines of the western religion be carefully reviewed for any traces that might encourage men to do evil, and that a couple of men be ordered to infiltrate both the western religion and the White Lotus to learn about them and their fundamental differences. Yang pointed to the reputation for integrity the westerners had established over thirty years of contact with literati and commoners as proof against the unfounded charges of their critics.¹⁸¹

Before the elaborate processes of discovery which Hsü and Yang recommended could be discussed at court, much less implemented, Shen Ch'üeh received authorization to arrest the missionaries from Fang Ts'ung-che, the Minister of Rites at Peking who shortly was to become the leading grand secretary. Warned, Longobardo and Aleni were able to leave Nanking before Shen sent officers to the Jesuits' residence to take away Vagnoni. (The other Jesuit, Alvaro Semedo [1586–1658], was ill and remained under house arrest temporarily.) No Chinese were arrested at first, but gradually lay brothers, the mission's servants, and local Christians who called at the residence were taken into custody.¹⁸² In Peking, deUrsis and Pantoja, although named in Shen Ch'üeh's first memorial, were not arrested. Pantoja drafted a pamphlet defending the religion of the Lord of Heaven and its adherents, and he sent it to Nanking to be printed, which may have exacerbated the situation.¹⁸³ The document was engraved and about a hundred copies were printed, but before they could be distributed all involved were arrested.¹⁸⁴ Everyone had to endure months of jail, interrogations, and beatings, until at the end of 1616 (or early in 1617 by the Western calendar), an edict was prepared and later issued ordering that Vagnoni, Pantoja, and their accomplices be taken

180 Yang T'ing-yün, "Hsiao luan pu ping ming shuo." A manuscript copy held in the Vatican Library is reproduced in *T'ien-chu-chiao tung ch'uan wen-hsien hsiu-pien* (Taipei, 1966), Vol. 1, p. 39. Yang's essay is trans. in Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–1617," pp. 303–07.

181 Yang T'ing-yün, "Hsiao luan pu ping ming shuo." Yang's proposal that one or two men be ordered to enter the White Lotus religion (42; p. 45) persuades me that his essay, which replies to one of Shen Ch'üeh's main insinuations, was written in 1616–17, and not in 1622, as Standaert, *Yang Ting-yün*, p. 93 infers, that is, during or immediately after the major White Lotus uprising in Shan-tung. It would have been foolish in 1622 to claim the government needed to ascertain whether the White Lotus represented a danger. It is quite possible that in a letter in 1622, as Semedo later recorded, Hsü Kuang-ch'i set forth (Yang's) fourteen points on the differences between the religion of the Lord of Heaven and the White Lotus religion. Standaert wonders if Semedo was mistaken about the attribution to Hsü instead of Yang in 1622.

182 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–17," pp. 45–51.

183 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–17," pp. 54 and 59–60.

184 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616–17," pp. 60–64.

to Canton and sent back to their own countries.¹⁸⁵ The rationale in the edict was that, as foreigners, they were a threat to the security of the state, and that Vagnoni in particular had been involved in establishing a religion to mislead commoners. The only allusion to their involvement with literati was a reference to the earlier recommendation that Pantoja might assist in calendrical calculations.¹⁸⁶ Shen Te-fu, who had met and admired Ricci, commented on the affair in 1618 or 1619. He summarized the main point in the memorials by Shen Ch'üeh and the others as, "In Nanking the religion of the Lord of Heaven is inflaming ignorant commoners, and the believers are numerous," but he also noted that the Ministry of Rites had requested that Pantoja and others with knowledge of calendrical methods be allowed to participate in investigation of the sun, moon, and planets. The barbarians were expelled, and Shen Te-fu added that "They were quite mistaken if they thought they could take advantage of our turmoil to penetrate China (*Chung-hua*)."¹⁸⁷

Pantoja and deUrsis left Peking under escort for Canton in the spring of 1617. Sambiasi and Longobardo, who had not been specifically named in any of the memorials, went to stay with Yang T'ing-yün in Hangchow.¹⁸⁸ In Nanking, Vagnoni and Smedo were taken to a hearing to verify their identities as foreigners, and then, after being allowed to dispose of some of their personal effects which had not been confiscated, they were placed in wooden cages and carried to Canton.¹⁸⁹ The twenty or so Chinese who had been arrested with them had trials and received sentences ranging from forced labor service to being sent home after a final beating.¹⁹⁰ Vagnoni, Smedo, Pantoja, and deUrsis were confined in Canton until 1618, when they were taken to Macao, supposedly to await a ship to carry them away. Pantoja soon died there, as did deUrsis in 1620. Vagnoni and Smedo remained in Macao until they could re-enter China as missionaries in 1622. From 1617 to 1620 missionary activity was at a near standstill, with no new books printed and no overt attempts to engage the literati.

Re-establishing the Learning from Heaven

After the Nanking incident faded, the renewed dissemination of the Learning from Heaven through publications and public roles for the missionaries was

185 *Shen-tsung shih lu*, ch. 552, 1a-2a (Vol. 121, pp. 10425-26). The edict is trans. in Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616-1617," pp. 85-86.

186 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616-1617," pp. 85-86.

187 Shen Te-fu, *Wan-li Yeh-huo pien*, Vol. 3, p. 748. Shen's report is a shortened version of the material which also appears in the *Shih-lu*. On Shen's conversation with Ricci, see p. 785.

188 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616-1617," p. 88.

189 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616-1617," pp. 91-94.

190 Kelly, "The Anti-Christian persecution of 1616-1617," pp. 99-103.

effected under the leadership of Hsü Kuang-ch'i, Li Chih-tsao, and Yang T'ing-yün. In the last few years of the Wan-li reign Hsü was increasingly active in military affairs, particularly military preparedness near the capital and defense policy in the northeast against the growing Manchu menace. In collaboration with Yang, who was still in retirement in Hangchow, and with Li, who was still serving as an official of the Ministry of Works at Kao-yu on the Grand Canal north of Yangchow, Hsü, in 1619–20, arranged for four cannons to be brought from Macao to bolster Ming defenses.¹⁹¹ The implication was that Jesuits would follow the cannon north to aid in their deployment and give instruction on their use. From 1620, the missionaries were moving away from Yang's residence in Hangchow. Aleni went to Shansi. Cattaneo and then Sambiasi went to Shanghai and Chia-ting, where a new church was opened. Semedo left Macao in 1620 for Hangchow, the younger Manoel Diaz reached Peking in 1621, and a few years later, Vagnoni, with a new Chinese name, went to the mission in Shansi.¹⁹² The leading foe of the Jesuits, Shen Ch'üeh, was appointed as a grand secretary in 1621, and a major White Lotus uprising occurred in Shantung in 1622, which brought renewed protests against the presence of the foreigners, but they returned to the capital after Shen left office in 1622. Two new Jesuits arrived in Macao in 1619, Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666) and Johann Terrenz (or Schreck, 1576–1630). They were both especially knowledgeable in astronomy and other western sciences, and were sent to Peking with Longobardo in 1623.¹⁹³ Another newly arrived missionary, Francisco Furtado (1587–1653), went first to Chia-ting and then remained in Hangchow in association with Li Chih-tsao, who resigned from office in 1623.¹⁹⁴

Yang T'ing-yün took the lead in renewing publications. In 1621, he printed his two *chüan* book entitled *Tai i p'ien* (*In Place of Doubt*). It was cast as responses by Mi-ke (i.e., Michael, referring Yang himself) to twenty-four sets of questions put by a Confucian (*ju*) expressing doubt about certain ideas brought by the literati from the West (*hsi shih*).¹⁹⁵ Yang rehearsed the Aristotelian model of a spherical earth inhabited on all sides by humans and in the middle of concentric spheres carrying the visible celestial bodies. He dismissed Buddhist concepts of multi-layered heavens as contrary to the pattern of the heavens (*p'ien wen*) which was made by the

191 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, pp. 132–33 and 138, and Fang Hao, *Li Chih-tsao yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1966), pp. 157–67.

192 Fang Hao, *Li Chih-tsao yen-chiu*, pp. 167–71; DMB, under Aleni, Cattaneo, Sambiasi, Semedo, and Vagnoni; Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 187.

193 DMB, under Schall and Terrenz.

194 DMB, under Furrado; Fang Hao, *Li Chih-tsao yen-chiu*, p. 205.

195 Yang T'ing-yün, "Tsung lun," 12, *Tai yi p'ien*, rpt. in *T'ien-chu chiao tung ch'uan wen-hsien* (Taipei, 1965), p. 495.

one Lord of Heaven.¹⁹⁶ The Lord of Heaven was the Creator of all things, and Yang contested the theory of Chang Tsai that everything is constituted from unitary *ch'i* (particles?), and the Ch'eng-Chu theory that the coherence (*li*) in the particular clusters of *ch'i* is what makes things as they are. He disputed the claim of Chu Hsi that there is no need to think there was something, in particular a ruler (*chu tsai*), which “made” the phenomenal world, as all things come into being “of themselves” (*tz'u jan*) without the intentionality of any external agent.¹⁹⁷ The evidence of our senses should persuade us, Yang argued, that the physical world is not accidental but can only be the result of the omnipotence of the Lord of Heaven, who made heaven and earth in seven days.¹⁹⁸ The position taken on whether the cosmos was created by an exterior something, or was generated autonomously, marked a fundamental difference between the Learning from Heaven of the missionaries and the Learning of the Way transmitted from the Sung philosophers.

Yang also explained the concept of the omnipresent Lord of Heaven, called *Tou-ssu* (*Deus*) in the western countries, where, in the temples of worship in antiquity, he was represented by a canonical text, not by a form or shape.¹⁹⁹ He described how the Lord of Heaven took pity on humans, who earlier had innate moral knowledge (*liang chih*) but had lost it; the Lord descended to earth and assumed a human identity, called *Yeh-su* (Jesus), or savior of the world.²⁰⁰ Yang told of how Mary was the mother, of the crucifixion and the meaning of the cross, and of the Trinity.²⁰¹ Yang pointed out that knowledge of these is not contained in the Five Classics or the Four Books, although they do contain the ideas of Heaven's power and the worship of Heaven. He stressed that rather than being either wholly inborn, or a product of one's culture, knowledge of morality and the capacity to be moral comes to each person by the grace or gift of the Lord of Heaven.²⁰² This idea of Heaven's grace had precedents in the Classics, too, but they were not the same, as Yang tried to show. Finally, Yang devoted several of his responses in the book to allaying doubts about the origins, motives, conduct, and learning

196 Yang T'ing yü, “Tsung lun,” 1.12a–13a (pp. 346–51).

197 Yang T'ing-yün, “Tsung lun,” 1.1a (p. 303). Parts of this first response are trans. in Standaert, *Yang T'ing-yün*, pp. 111–12.

198 Yang T'ing-yün, “Tsung-lun,” 1.2a–3a (pp. 306–07).

199 Yang T'ing-yün, “Tsung-lun,” 2.1a–b (pp. 383–84).

200 Yang T'ing-yün, “Tsung-lun,” 2.2a (p. 385). This passage is trans. in Standaert, *Yang T'ing-yün*, pp. 129–30.

201 Yang T'ing-yün, “Tsung-lun,” 2.3b–11b.

202 Yang T'ing-yün, “Tsung-lun,” 2.16b (p. 614). Standaert, *Yang T'ing-yün*, pp. 150–51 and 207, provides other examples on this point from Yang's writings.

of the literati from the west, all the while sharply distinguishing their teachings from Buddhism.

All the efforts to assimilate or accommodate the Learning from Heaven to Chinese vocabulary and precedents notwithstanding, Yang was making some of the differences plain. In a work which was published posthumously, he was explicit and succinct. “The teaching of veneration of Heaven and service to Heaven is similar [in the canonical texts of the West and China], but to point to material substance as heaven and to recognize coherence (*li*) and *ch'i* as constituting heaven, [which was taught by Chu Hsi,] is different from saying that Heaven must have a Lord. The theory that the Lord is without voice or smell and surpasses the human’s sense of hearing, seeing, and thinking is similar, but the great Lord’s coming down to redeem and save the world, [the distinct stages of] the teaching by the Word, the teaching by His person, and the teaching by grace, and morality prospering more after the teaching by grace than in ancient times are all differences from the concept that people now are not as good as those of ancient times.”²⁰³ In the introduction to his *In Place of Doubt* (*Tai i p'ien*), Yang was explicit in addressing the question of why, given the similarities, “we Confucians” (*wu ju*) should be concerned with these ideas instead of dismissing them as “other strands” (*i tuan*) like Ch’an Buddhism, or the speculative philosophizing of the third century.²⁰⁴ His book was an attempt to elucidate an answer which would persuade his literati readers.

Yang’s writings were not limited to religious doctrine, although it was the aspect of the Learning from Heaven which most concerned him. After he returned to Peking in 1622 to accept official appointment again, he wrote a preface for Aleni’s treatise on the system of education in the Western countries called the *Hsi hsüeh fan* (*General Account of Study in the West*). Giving their names in transliteration, Aleni described the six disciplines in universities as rhetoric, (natural) philosophy, including physics and mathematics, medicine, law, canon law, and theology, in ascending order of importance. He explained what was covered in each course of study and when they were studied in the student’s career.²⁰⁵ In his preface Yang stressed that the Learning from Heaven published in Chinese had behind it an enormous body of knowledge not exhausted by what had been translated or even by the 7,000 works recently brought by ship, and that this knowledge had long been absent in

203 Yang T'ing-yün, *Tai i hsiu p'ien*, 1.2a, altered from translation in Standaert, *Yang T'ing-yün*, p. 207.

204 Yang T'ing-yün, “Tsung lun,” esp. 1a (p. 495). Cf. the beginning of *Tai i hsiu p'ien*, trans. in Standaert, *Yang T'ing-yün*, p. 206, for the same question, but more sharply posed.

205 Aleni, *Hsi hsüeh fan*, in Li Chih-tsao, *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u ban*, pp. 27–59. Notice that Li put this text first in the collection.

China.²⁰⁶ Yang also wrote a preface for another book Aleni published in 1623 with Yang's editorial assistance, the *Chib-fang wai chi* (*Record of Countries not Listed in the Records Office*). The five *chüan* of this book described Asia, Europe, Africa, America, and the Four Oceans, with maps, and named the countries and some of their special attributes.²⁰⁷ In his preface Yang returned repeatedly to the theme that when we confront this immense world and all that is in it, we must ask who or what causes it to be so. Each time Yang answered his own question: The Great Ruler, the Master Craftsman, the omnipotent Lord of Creation. According to Yang the literati from the west were drawing men to a more profound respect for the Divinity in Heaven (*t'ien ti*).²⁰⁸ Of course, ambiguities remained. Yang's long time acquaintance, Ch'en Chi-ju, wrote in a commemoration of him that when Yang resigned from office in 1625, he returned to Hangchow to "discourse on learning and discuss the Way."²⁰⁹ Such formulations obscured Yang's repeated assertion that new ideas were being propagated.

Yeh Hsiang-kao (1562–1627) is an example of a literatus who was sympathetic, but never convinced to be an adherent of the Learning from Heaven. From Foochow prefecture, Yeh achieved his *chin-shih* degree at a young age in 1583. He served in the Hanlin Academy and then at the Imperial College (*Kuo-tzu-chien*) in Nanking,²¹⁰ where he met Ricci, probably in 1599. Nine years later he went to Peking as Minister of Rites and Grand Secretary, and from 1608 to 1614 he was the leading, and sometimes the only, Grand Secretary. Called out of retirement to be a grand secretary to his former pupil who had become the T'ai-ch'ang emperor in 1620, Yeh served from 1621 to 1624, when he resigned as the conflicts between Wei Chung-hsien and Tung-lin partisans were becoming more vicious. On his way back to Foochow, Yeh met Aleni in Hangchow and invited him to Fukien. Aleni went, and partly with Yeh's backing, started the first mission in Fukien in 1625 and made hundreds of converts. He remained there until his death in 1649.²¹¹

After leaving Peking in 1624, Yeh Hsiang-kao wrote a sympathetic preface for Yang T'ing-yün's booklet, never published, on the Ten Commandments.²¹² He commented on how learned the men from the Great West

206 Aleni, *Hsi hsiieh fan*, esp. 1a–b and 4b–5a (pp. 9–10 and 16–17).

207 A more detailed account is in Bernard Hung-kay Luk, "A study of Giulio Aleni's *Chib-fang wai chi*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 40, No. 1 (1977), pp. 58–84. Also see Peterson, "Western natural philosophy," pp. 306–07.

208 Yang T'ing-yün, preface, esp. 5b (p. 1296) in Giulio Aleni, *Chib-fang wai chi*, in Li Chih-tsao, *T'ien-hsiieh ch'üan*, Vol. 3.

209 Ch'en Chi-ju, quoted in Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 153.

210 See DMB, under Yeh Hsiang-kao.

211 See DMB, under Giulio Aleni, and Dunne, *Generation of giants*, pp. 189–92 and 259–61.

212 The preface by Yeh is trans. in Bernard Luk, "A serious matter of life and death: Learned conversations at Foochow in 1627," *East Meets West*, eds. Ronan and Oh, pp. 201–02.

were, and how they set an example in venerating Heaven. While noting Yang's sincerity in pursuing their doctrines, Yeh also observed that aspects of their learning might seem fanciful to some, even where they were an improvement on Buddhism. In Yeh's view, "Many literati and officials have studied with them, but relatively few admire them so profoundly and believe them so wholeheartedly as to think they have truly found out about human nature and solved the questions of life and death."²¹³ In the spring of 1627, Yeh Hsiang-kao made a visit to Foochow from his home in a nearby district. Aleni called on him, and the next day Yeh in turn called on Aleni, who subsequently published a record of their conversations over the two days on the Learning from Heaven.²¹⁴ Aleni, of course, was concerned with distinguishing his doctrine from Buddhism and arguing for a single creator, the Lord of Heaven. Since he was the one who published it, the account is designed to convey his explanations to questions or objections, as was Yang T'ing-yün's *Tai i p'ien*. Yeh's questions seem to be his own, but also represent what other literati might ask.²¹⁵ After listening to Aleni's theory that "there is a Lord of Heaven who made the ten thousand things of heaven and earth and rules over them," Yeh wondered how there could be a Lord of Heaven before there was a heaven and earth of which to be lord.²¹⁶ Aleni argued that what makes it so (*so i jan*) must be prior to that which is its consequence (*ch'i ku jan*).²¹⁷ The issue was whether the cosmos had to be created by something external to it or was generated from spontaneous processes within it. When Yeh Hsiang-kao pointed to the Sung idea of a Supreme Ultimate (*t'ai chi*) being prior and responsible for the separation of the physical heaven from the earth, Aleni insisted, quite correctly, that the idea of the Supreme Ultimate did not go beyond the concepts of *li* (coherence) and *ch'i* (particles?) and that they could not of themselves have the consciousness to make something.²¹⁸ Yeh asked Aleni if this external Creator made the bad as well as the good, a problem which he seemed to find troubling.²¹⁹ When Yeh resumed the questioning on the second day, he returned repeatedly to the problem of evil. If the omnipotent Lord of Heaven created everything for the benefit of humans, Yeh asked, why did he create fanged and poisonous things which

²¹³ Slightly altered from trans. in Bernard Luk, "A serious matter," p. 201.

²¹⁴ Giulio Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi* (1847 edn.), rpt. in *T'ien-chu-chiao tung ch'uan wen-hsien hsü p'ien* (Taipei, 1966), Vol. 1, pp. 419–93. Aleni described the two meetings, 1a, p. 435, and 7b, p. 448. The conversations are the subject in Luk, "A serious matter," pp. 173–206.

²¹⁵ Luk, "A serious matter," p. 176.

²¹⁶ Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi*, 4b, p. 442; Luk, "A serious matter," p. 187.

²¹⁷ Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi*, 4b, p. 442; Luk, "A serious matter," p. 187.

²¹⁸ Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi*, 5b, p. 444; Luk, "A serious matter," p. 187.

²¹⁹ Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi*, 6a, p. 445; Luk, "A serious matter," p. 188. Even without assuming there was a creator, the proponents of the Learning of the Way had struggled, too, with the problem of the presence of evil or disorder in a world they held was characterized by coherence (*li*).

are not only useless but harmful to humans?²²⁰ Why do good men suffer harm? Aleni answered that "The way of the Creator is unfathomable and the understanding of humans is limited."²²¹ Why are good men harmed while bad men escape? Or why are there so many bad people and so few good ones?²²² (Yeh was asking these questions when Wei Chung-hsien was at the height of his influence and causing the deaths of men affiliated with the Tung-lin Academy with whom Yeh was aligned.) Yeh asked other versions of these questions about evil without appearing to be convinced by Aleni's answers that the Lord of Heaven has his purposes. Yeh also questioned Aleni's expositions of the immortal soul, the existence of heaven and hell for souls after death, the coming of Jesus, the good effects of the teaching in the western countries, and so on. Yeh's position at the end seemed still to be one of distanced but polite curiosity, although Aleni records at the end that Yeh was expressing his continued interest in the teachings which are new and strange.²²³ Aleni did not have a chance to pursue these ideas with Yeh, who died before the year was out.

The next year, 1628, another literatus published a small book on the doctrine of the Lord of Heaven (*t'ien chu chih chiao*) while he was serving as a prefectural judge in Yangchow.²²⁴ Wang Cheng (1571–1644) was from Shensi, not from Chiang-nan.²²⁵ After passing the provincial examination in 1594, he seems to have failed nine times in the metropolitan examinations before he passed in 1622. Wang became aware of the missionaries on his trips to Peking. He told of reading Pantoja's *Ch'i k'o* (*Seven [sins] to overcome*), which was printed in 1614. Wang was so moved that he abandoned his interest in Buddhism and Taoism, which he had been pursuing for twenty years. He had many discussions on the new doctrine with Pantoja, who was forced to leave Peking in 1617.²²⁶ It is not clear when Wang Cheng was baptized, but it may have been while he was in contact with Pantoja; Wang later wrote that when he was baptized he made a vow not to take a concubine, but he submitted to his father's demands after passing the *chin-shih* examination in 1622.²²⁷ In any case, Wang publicly expressed his commitment to the Lord of Heaven in a preface he wrote in 1621 for Yang T'ing-yün's book, *Tai i*

220 Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi*, 7b–8a, pp. 448–49; Luk, "A serious matter," p. 189.

221 Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi*, 9b–10a, pp. 452–53; Luk, "A serious matter," p. 190.

222 Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi*, 11a and 12b, pp. 453 and 458; Luk, "A serious matter," pp. 191–92.

223 Aleni, *San-shan lun hsüeh chi*, 30a, p. 493; Luk, "A serious matter," p. 196.

224 Fang Hao, "Wang Cheng chih shih-chi chi ch'i shu-ju hsi-yang hsüeh-shu chih kung-hsien," *Wen Shih Che hsüeh pao*, 13 (1964) pp. 39–40.

225 For a summary of his life, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, under Wang Cheng.

226 Wang Cheng, *Wei T'ienaijen chi lun* (1628); (a copy is preserved in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Courant no. 3368), 3b–5b.

227 See Albert Chan, "Late Ming society and the Jesuit missionaries," *East Meets West*, eds. Ronan and Oh, pp. 171–72.

p'ien (In place of doubt). Elaborating on the theme of faith (*hsin*), Wang wrote that in his book Michael (i.e., Yang T'ing-yün) was providing evidence for believing what had been brought by the literati from the West.²²⁸ Probably while he was in mourning in 1625, Wang briefly studied Latin with Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628) in Sian, Shensi. Together they worked on a booklet showing the systematic use of Roman letters to record the pronunciation of Chinese characters without recourse to other characters. The printed version in 1626 was called *Hsi ju erh mu tzu* (*Western Confucians' aids for the ear and eye [in reading characters]*).²²⁹ While he was in Peking awaiting reappointment to office in 1626, Wang met the Jesuits Longobardo, Schall, and Terrenz. Based on discussions with Terrenz, Wang translated and published another book in 1627 called *Yüan Hsi ch'i ch'i t'u-shuo lu-tsui* (*Epitome of illustrated Explanations of exotic devices from the far west*), which included wood block prints of machines and tools. Both books intentionally presented material which had not been previously known in China.²³⁰

The issue of new ideas was raised explicitly in Wang's own exposition of the new faith which was printed in 1628 as the *Wei T'ien ai jen chi lun* (*Exemplary discussion of [the doctrine of] fearing Heaven and loving mankind*). The question posed was why, given the rich and various literature transmitted from antiquity which Wang had studied for more than twenty years, would he reject it to "firmly believe what the Confucians from the west call the doctrine of the Lord of Heaven?"²³¹ Put in other words, "Why do you simply dismiss what you have already learned and believe what you have not? Why do you dismiss traditional learning and believe the new learning, dismiss the learning from close at hand and believe the learning from far away?" This was a strange doctrine which the sages of antiquity did not have,²³² although they, and we Chinese now, he contended, know the ideas of fearing Heaven and loving other humans.²³³ To answer these (rhetorical) questions, Wang reviewed his discussions with Pantoja, and then explained in his own words the attributes of *Tou-ssu* (Deus), or the Lord of Heaven, as omnipotent, omniscient creator who must be venerated by his creation, humans. To save their enduring souls, humans must do good and eschew evil; thus, they might enter Heaven (*t'ien t'ang*) and avoid Hell (*ti yü*). Wang made no mention of Jesus, either as man or savior, nor did he refer to the concept of the Holy Spirit. His message

228 Wang Cheng, "Hsü," 2a–b, in Yang T'ing-yün, *Tai yi p'ien*, rpt. in *T'ien-chu-chiao tung ch'uan wen-hsien* (Taipei, 1965), pp. 485–86. Cf. Fang Hao, "Wang Cheng," pp. 40–41.

229 Lo Ch'ang-p'ei, "Yeh-su hui-shih tsai yin-yün-hsüeh shang te kung-hsien," *Kuo-li Chung-yang-yen-chiu yüan li-shih yü-yen-yen-chiu so chi-k'uan*, 1, No. 3 (1930), pp. 274–75.

230 As pointed out in Wang Cheng, *Wei T'ien ai jen chi shuo*, 2b.

231 Wang Cheng, *Wei T'ien ai jen chi shuo*, 1b–2a.

232 Wang Cheng, *Wei T'ien ai jen chi shuo*, p. 2a.

233 Wang Cheng, *Wei T'ien ai jen chi shuo*, p. 3a.

was one of moral rectification set in a framework provided by the Lord of Heaven. In explaining the Ten Commandments, he reduces them to two themes: fear Heaven and love your fellow humans.²³⁴ This seems to have been the core teaching which Wang promoted when he went back to Shensi after being impeached and exiled because troops in his jurisdiction in the northeast rebelled in 1631. Wang's book was addressed to a wider audience and was more like Ricci's *T'ien-chu shih i* than Yang T'ing-yün's *Tai i p'ien*. It followed the strategy of arguing on the basis of a "natural religion" which had precedents to be found in the Five Classics, but not presenting in detail some of the core doctrines of the revealed religion. Wang's book offered an elaborate new rationale for persuading oneself and others of the need to be moral. This was part of Wang's motive when he founded a benevolent society (*jen hui*) in 1634 to do good works in Shensi a few years after he had helped Giacomo Rho (1593–1638) build a church.²³⁵

The more important publishing event in 1628 was the completion of a collectanea edited by Li Chih-tsao. Entitled *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han* (*first Collection on the Learning from Heaven*), it included most of the important works on the Learning from Heaven up to that time.²³⁶ Li divided the collection into two parts, labeled "general principles" (*li*) and "concrete phenomena" (*ch'i*), each containing ten titles. Under the "general principles" heading Li placed Ricci's books on friendship, the *Twenty-five discourses*, the *Ten essays on the extraordinary man*, and *Pien hsüeh i tu* (*posthumous documents of [Ricci's] debates on learning*), which assembled a few of his polemical written and oral exchanges with critics. Also included were Pantoja's *Seven [sins] to overcome*, a book by Francesco Sambiasi (1582–1649) on the soul, which was translated by Hsü Kuang-ch'i with his preface in 1624, and Aleni's two books on the education system in Europe and on the geography of the world. Li Chih-tsao also included a short treatise on the recent discovery of a stele in Sian which recorded the presence of (Nestorian) Christianity at the T'ang capital in the eighth century. The second part of the collection was comprised of the book on water technology by deUrsis and Hsü Kuang-ch'i, and eight works on mathematics and astronomy. These involved various degrees of authorship, editing, and preface writing by Ricci, deUrsis, Hsü Kuang-ch'i, and Li Chih-tsao on geometry, arithmetic, trigonometry, surveying, and the new

234 Weng Cheng, *Wei T'ien ai jen chi shuo*, pp. 43b–44a.

235 Fang Hao, "Wang Cheng," pp. 43 and 46.

236 Fang Hao pointed out that if they had not been collected and reprinted by Li, some of the twenty works he included would have been lost, as their earlier versions are not extant. See Fang Hao, "Li Chih-tsao chi k'o T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han k'ao," introducing *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han*, ed. Li Chih-tsao (1628, rpt. Taipei, 1965), p. 1. Liang Chia-mien, in *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 180, argued that *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han* was printed in 1629 or 1630, not 1628, the date of the preface.

instruments for measuring celestial phenomena. The tenth title in the second part was a little book, first printed in 1615 by Manoel Diaz (1574–1659), called *T'ien wen lüeh* (*Catechism on the Heavens*). Diaz provided a summary of the Aristotelian cosmos and added a report on the recent discovery, through the use of a telescope (by Galileo), of the moons of Jupiter, Saturn's ring, sun spots, and the existence of numerous stars which cannot be seen by the unaided eye.²³⁷ (A small book by Schall on the telescope, printed in 1626, was not included by Li.)²³⁸

Li Chih-tsao's selection of titles, although seemingly biased toward works with which he was involved, represents the breadth of the Learning from Heaven as it was represented to the literate audience over a thirty-year period in late Ming. From cosmology to technology, geometry to geography, ethics to eschatology, the parts were interrelated and mutually sustaining. They were all connected, even if ambiguously, by the new meanings imputed to the word *t'ien*, heaven. Li Chih-tsao explained in his preface that the collection made the writings easily available; they conveyed "what is called the most primary, most true, and most broad doctrine which the sage [i.e., Confucius] would not change if he came back."²³⁹ It was this broad doctrine, the Learning from Heaven rather than the Catholic doctrines that were the missionaries' main concern, that represented an intellectual alternative for literati. Appearing at the beginning of the Ch'ung-chen reign (1628–44), the *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han* represented the Learning from Heaven as a coherent, practicable set of teachings.

The Learning from Heaven in the emperor's service

The accession of a new emperor in 1627 allowed a new political climate in which it was possible to enhance the legitimacy of the Learning from Heaven. Hsü Kuang-ch'i, who had been living in retirement since resigning on a plea of illness in 1621, returned to office in the Ministry of Rites in the first month of 1628.²⁴⁰ An opportunity presented itself in the fifth month of 1629, when there was a solar eclipse visible in north China. Hsü Kuang-ch'i submitted a prediction of the time the eclipse would be witnessed at Peking which turned out to be more accurate than the prediction made by the

237 Manoel Diaz, *T'ien wen lüeh*, 43a–b, in Li Chih-tsao, *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han*, Vol. 5, pp. 2717–2718. Cf. Pasquale M. D'Elia, *Galileo in China*, trans. Rufus Suter and Mathew Sciascia (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 8, and Peterson, "Western natural philosophy," p. 298.

238 See D'Elia, *Galileo in China*, pp. 33–41.

239 Li Chih-tsao, "T'i tz'u," 1b, in *T'ien-hsüeh ch'u han*, p. 2.

240 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, pp. 142 and 158.

Directorate of Astronomy.²⁴¹ Putting a negative interpretation on the fact that the system for computing astronomical and thus calendrical events had not been adjusted for 260 years, the Ministry of Rites proposed that an office for calendar reform be established, and that Hsü Kuang-ch'i, Li Chih-tsao, Hsing Yün-lu, Fan Shou-chi (all four of whom had been similarly nominated in 1611–12), and others with relevant expertise be appointed to staff the new office. It was noted that Pantoja and deUrsis, who also had been nominated twenty years earlier, were now dead, and Longobardo and Terrenz were named instead as the foreigners from the west who could participate.²⁴² The proposal was accepted, and before the year was out the order had been issued for a calendrical (reform) office (*li chü*) to be built on the site of the Shou-shan Academy, which had been demolished in 1622.²⁴³ Li Chih-tsao, though ill, was recalled from retirement in Hangchow, and artisans were hired to make the instruments needed for accurate observation of celestial phenomena.²⁴⁴ In a memorial detailing ten factors in the calendar system which needed to be revised and ten instruments to be built, Hsü Kuang-ch'i stressed the need to combine correct theory and accurately measured observation.²⁴⁵ He also argued that the reforms would bring supplemental benefits, including more accurate surveying, accounting, construction, mapping, time keeping, and even medical practice (because doctors who understood the relation between astral conditions and their patients' health could adjust medicines and acupuncture treatment with more precision).²⁴⁶ Terrenz was well trained in mathematics and astronomy. He had studied with Galileo in Padua and was accepted as one of the Lincei in Rome in 1611; later that year he joined the Society of Jesus. Terrenz had been recruited for the China mission during Trigault's travels in Europe from 1614 to 1618 to gather money, books, and experts in anticipation of such a project as was approved in 1629. Terrenz reached Macao in 1619, Chia-ting in 1622, and had been in Peking since 1625. He continued to send letters from China asking Kepler for advice on predicting eclipses and adjusting European ephemerides to Peking's longi-

241 See Hsü's memorial in Hsü Kuang-ch'i, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, pp. 319–22. The times calculated for the beginning, maximum, and end of the eclipse according to the Ta-t'ung, the Muslim, and the new method are given in a note, pp. 323–24.

242 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, pp. 163–64; also *Ming shih*, 31, p. 529. The fullest account in a Western language of the Jesuits' participation in efforts at calendar reform is in Henri Bernard, "L'Encyclopédie astronomique du Père Schall (Tch'ong-tcheng li-chou, 1629, et Si-yang sin-fa li-chou, 1645). La réforme du calendrier chinois sous l'influence de Clavius, de Galilée et de Kepler," *Monumenta Serica*, 3 (1938), pp. 35–77 and 441–527.

243 See Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 147.

244 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, pp. 164 and 166.

245 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, "T'iao i li-fa hsiu-cheng sui-ch'a shu," in *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, pp. 332–38. Cf. Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, pp. 164–65. Hsü's points are also abstracted in *Ming shih*, 31, p. 530.

246 Hsü Kuang-ch'i, "T'iao i li-fa hsiu-cheng sui-ch'a shu," pp. 337–38.

tude.²⁴⁷ However, Terrenz as well as Li Chih-tsao died in 1630, before much work could be done.²⁴⁸ Hsü Kuang-ch'i then recommended that Giacomo Rho (1593–1638) and Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666) be called to the capital.²⁴⁹ Rho came from Shansi and Schall from Shensi, where each had worked with Wang Cheng.²⁵⁰ Both spent the remainder of their lives in Peking as foreign experts on calendrical and astronomical matters.

As it became known that foreigners with no examination degrees were being appointed to government offices and receiving stipends for their knowledge of calendar making, others sought to compete with them. In 1630, a certified student from Szechwan was recommended by a censor as an expert who could correct many of the accumulated errors in the old system for computing the calendar. Hsü Kuang-ch'i sought to thwart him by exposing the deficiencies in his method, including misunderstandings of the old system, and the inaccuracies of his predictions.²⁵¹ The next year, 1631, a commoner named Wei Wen-k'uei, who had been influenced by the attempts by Hsing Yün-lu twenty years earlier to reform the calendar,²⁵² had two works he had written submitted to the court for examination of his claims for improving the accuracy of the calendar. Hsü Kuang-ch'i again wrote a critique, contrasting Wei's proposals with the new method's results for times of eclipses and for calculating the time of the winter solstice, which was the crucial moment in the Ming calendar.²⁵³ Commoner Wei's claims had little chance against the authority of Hsü, who was a grand secretary and an examiner for the metropolitan examinations that spring.²⁵⁴ For three years, Hsü submitted a series of detailed memorials, some with diagrams, explaining eclipses and eclipse prediction and arguing over and over for the superiority of the new methods and the new tabulated data, all in an apparent effort to educate the emperor and the court on the merits of the new ideas and the western experts associated with the Learning from Heaven. By 1632, Schall and Rho and their Chinese collaborators, basing their work, in part, on the theories of Tycho Brahe, had prepared and presented to the emperor more than seventy *chüan* of explanations of theories, methods, and instruments as well as the more accurate tables to be used in reckoning the positions of the sun

247 See DMB, under Terrenz.

248 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, pp. 172 and 174.

249 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 173. See Hsü Kuang-ch'i, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, pp. 345–46.

250 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 183.

251 Hsü's memorial is in Hsü Kuang-ch'i, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, pp. 359–61. Cf. Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 176, and MS, 31.531.

252 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 190, note 17.

253 MS, 31, pp. 532–34, and Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, pp. 185–86.

254 Liang Chia-mien, *Hsü Kuang-ch'i nien-p'u*, p. 185.

and moon (for solstices and eclipses). They also presented star tables and charts and ephemerides for the five planets.²⁵⁵

Hsü Kuang-ch'i died in 1633, but even after the loss of their most vigorous advocate and the last of the so-called Three Pillars, Jesuits continued to benefit from their involvement with an imperially sponsored project. The calendar office was taken over by Li T'ien-ching, a provincial official nominated by Hsü just before he died.²⁵⁶ Li was not a Christian, and he was criticized by Schall for not being a forceful advocate for the office.²⁵⁷ In 1634, with Hsü Kuang-ch'i gone, Wei Wen-k'uei memorialized again on his proposals for the calendar system. This time he was summoned to the capital and a calendar office was established for him on the east of the city to balance the Jesuit dominated office on the west. Both offices continued in competition with the regular calendar office and the Muslim office in the Directorate of Astronomy.²⁵⁸ In the first month of 1636, for example, the four sets of competitors gathered one night to correlate the accuracy of their predictions for a lunar eclipse. Li T'ien-ching was there with Rho and Schall, along with Wei Wen-k'uei, and officials from the Directorate of Astronomy and the Ministry of Rites. It was determined that Li's figure for the times of the eclipse were the best.²⁵⁹ The superiority of the western method of predicting planetary positions was repeatedly demonstrated, and Li T'ien-ching continued to supervise the production of tables and other writings by the western office. Although not all of them were printed in their entirety, the texts, tables and charts totaled about 137 *chüan* by 1636. They were known collectively as the *Ch'ung-chen li shu* (*Writings on the Calendar from the Ch'ung-chen reign*), a name changed under the Manchus to the *Hsi-yang hsin fa li shu* (*Writings on the calendar according to the new method from the West*). During the Ch'ung-chen reign the calendar was refined but never reformulated on the basis of western methods.²⁶⁰ Schall closed the western calendar office in 1642 rather than have it absorbed into the Directorate of Astronomy, but in 1644, he accepted the patronage of the

255 See Hsü's memorials on the presentations, in *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, pp. 371–72 and 385–86. The titles are also listed in Bernard, "L'Encyclopédie astronomique," Appendix 5, pp. 443–44. Presentation of tables and essays continued at least until 1636. Detailed discussion of the sections on cosmologies, the telescope, and other observational instruments in the calendar writings is in Hashimoto Keizō, "Ch'ung-chen li shu ni miru kagaku kakumei no ikkatei," in *Science and skills in Asia: A Festschrift for Prof. Yabuuti Kiyoshi* (Kyoto, 1982), pp. 370–390; also see Hashimoto Keizō, "Ch'ung-chen kair-eki to Hsü Kuang-ch'i no yakuwari," in *Explorations in the History of Science and Technology in China: Compiled in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Dr Joseph Needham* (Shanghai, 1982), esp. pp. 192–98.

256 Hsü's memorial in *Hsü Kuang-ch'i chi*, pp. 424–426. Cf. Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 222.

257 See Bernard, "L'Encyclopédie astronomique," p. 433, and Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 309.

258 *MS*, 31, p. 536. Some Jesuits suspected Li T'ien-ching had studied with Wei and was sympathetic to him; see Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 309.

259 *MS*, 31, 541. 260 See *MS*, 31, p. 543.

Manchus: appointed as the head of the Directorate, he and the new method were unrivaled for twenty years.²⁶¹

During the 1630s, the Jesuits enjoyed relative security to promote the Learning from Heaven. In 1637 there were sixteen missions. There were thousands of converts throughout the empire, but none so prominent as Hsü, Li, and Yang had been.²⁶² In Fukien, Aleni produced a book on natural philosophy called the *Hsing hsüeh tsu shu* (*A general account of the study of the natures of living things*) that was based on Galen's distinctions of the natural, vital, and animal (i.e., having to do with anima or soul) spirits.²⁶³ Aleni also wrote another short introduction to European culture called *Hsi-fang ta wen* (*Answers to questions about the west*).²⁶⁴ In Shansi, Vagnoni published a version of the Aristotelian cosmos which he called *Huan-yü shih-mo* (*Comprehensive account of the universe*). About the same time (1636–37), Schall published another elaborate argument for a Creator in a book called *Chu chih ch'ün cheng* (*A Host of evidence that the Lord rules*).²⁶⁵ But these were overshadowed by the work on the calendar at the capital as the foundation of the missionaries' continuing presence in China. Symbolic of this was the emperor's bestowing an inscription in his own hand on Rho and Schall in 1638; the inscription was four words, *Ch'in pao t'ien hsüeh*, or Imperial Praise on the Learning from Heaven.²⁶⁶ It may have been making reference only to their knowledge of celestial phenomena, but its recipients must have been willing to construe it to apply to all that they had been teaching in China for more than forty years.

The corpus of writings which represented the Learning from Heaven had at least three main interrelated aspects with implications for literati in late Ming. First, it presented knowledge of another cultural tradition which was geographically removed and previously unknown in China. The foreignness and newness were obvious to its admirers and seized upon by its opponents, but in late Ming, it was generally tolerated and not simply dismissed out of hand. It is noteworthy that, at the time and over the next two centuries, the opponents and their writings fared less well in the estimation of the literati audience than did the writings of the proponents of the Learning from Heaven. Although in Ch'ing times literati were less interested in knowing about the foreign culture, many of the new ideas, particularly about astronomy and other technical knowledge, were incorporated into their writings as well

261 See DMB, p. 1154. 262 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 309.

263 See Peterson, "Western natural philosophy," pp. 308–09.

264 See J. L. Mish, "Creating an image of Europe for China: Aleni's *Hsi-fang ta wen*," *Monumenta Serica*, 23 (1964), pp. 1–87.

265 Schall's book is reprinted in *T'ien-chu chiao tung ch'uan wen-hsien hsü pien* (Taipei, 1966), Vol. 2, pp. 495–615.

266 Dunne, *Generation of giants*, p. 310.

as imperially sponsored compilations. The missionaries did not always convey the newest European ideas (e.g., post-Copernican cosmology in particular, which had not yet been widely recognized in Europe)²⁶⁷ but they published what was, in effect, a comprehensive sampling of the current teaching in universities of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.²⁶⁸ It was new enough to be an alternative to inherited learning on these subjects in China.

Secondly, at the same time that the corpus revealed similarities in moral precepts in its teachings and in Chinese traditions, it presented broad philosophical propositions which were at variance with prevailing ideas. The propositions had Chinese analogues and were not therefore unimaginable to the readers. For example, proposals that the cosmos we perceive must have been caused by a creator or maker external to the processes of heaven and earth had appeared in various forms in the Chinese tradition, even if they were usually dismissed. The notion that the foundation of moral good was not simply inherent in all humans, waiting only to be discovered, also found proponents in the tradition as well even in late Ming times, so even though the missionaries' teaching of morality based on grace ran counter to Mencian assumptions, it was not inconceivable that an external power was the basis of the morality to be shared by all humans. Thus, it seems unwarranted to conclude that, on the plane of the "big ideas," or what might be called universal principles, Chinese and European concepts were incompatible or even mutually incomprehensible on some *a priori* grounds.²⁶⁹ One may not want to allow the possibility (which may have emboldened Ricci) that a "natural theology" existed in pre-Christian and even non-Christian thinkers, but it is instructive to see an Enlightenment philosopher such as Leibniz having no trouble construing a theist's sense of a divinity in Chu Hsi's concept of *li* (coherence).²⁷⁰

Thirdly, the corpus included ideas which required faith before they could be accepted, and which tended to be culturally specific rather than appearing to be universal. Examples are the idea of the incarnation of the divinity as a historical person in a remote place (from the Chinese perspective), the idea of eternal salvation after death, or the idea of giving precedence to a classical text from the West over the classics transmitted from Confucius.

Literati were sensitive in varying degrees to these three aspects, but they were aware of them all in reading the texts of the Learning of Heaven. A

267 See the summary of the cosmology presented in some of the Jesuits' writings in Ming in Nathan Sivin, "Copernicus in China," in *Colloquia Copernica* (Warsaw, 1973), pp. 76–82.

268 See Peterson, "Western natural philosophy," esp. pp. 315–16.

269 Jacques Gernet comes to this conclusion in an eloquently argued study. See his *Chine et Christianisme*. Gernet provides the best overview of the attacks on the Jesuits in late Ming, which he sees as no different from the situation in Ch'ing.

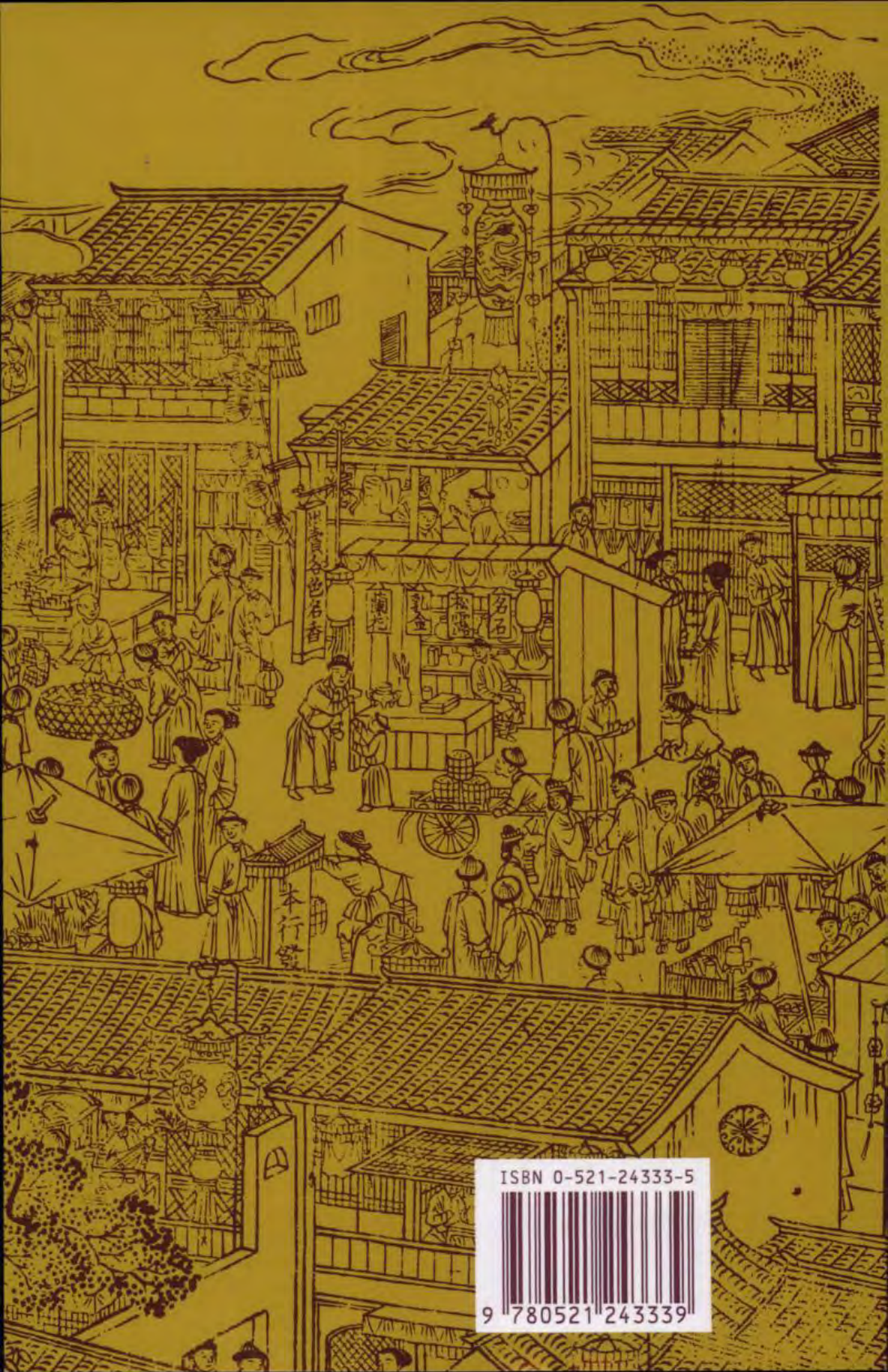
270 See the example cited in Gernet, *Chine et Christianisme*, pp. 279–80. (In the English trans., p. 206).

scholar named Sun Lan had gone to Schall to learn about heaven and earth and had a rather typical response. In his judgment, “It is always said that the classicists from the West (*hsi ju*) have the religious doctrine of overcoming the seven [sins], similar to the Confucians’ (*K’ung men*) teaching that ‘controlling oneself and adhering to the rites [is righteousness].’²⁷¹ Moreover, when one meets them and listens to their theories, the theories are quite detailed with regard to calendars and numbers, and are well suited for exposing the main principles of technologies and celestial phenomena, but when they prostrate themselves before a heavenly divinity (*t’ien shen*) and speak extravagantly about a celestial palace and a (sub-)terrestrial prison, then [the theories] are an ‘other religion’ (*i chiao*),” and not to be incorporated.²⁷² More generally, early on Li Chih, whom no one would charge with being a narrow-minded partisan of cultural conservatism, had expressed his astonishment that Ricci’s aim might be to displace the learning stemming from the Duke of Chou and Confucius.²⁷³ Yet that was, of course, what the western proponents of the Learning from Heaven hoped to do. They wanted the Learning from Heaven to be the main doctrine, not just “another strand” (*i tuan*).

271 From *Analekts*, 12, p. 1.

272 Sun Lan, “Liu t’ing yü ti yü shuo,” quoted in Hsieh Kuo-chen, *Ming mo Ch’ing ch’u ti hsüeh feng* (Peking, 1982), p. 6.

273 Li Chih, “Yü yü jen shu,” *Hsü Fen shu*, p. 36. Also see Shen Te-fu, *Yeh-huo pien*, p. 783.



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